THE INTERNATIONAL COMPANION TO

LEWIS GRASSIC GIBBON

EDITED BY SCOTT LYALL

VISIT…

The International Companion to Lewis Grassic Gibbon

INTERNATIONAL COMPANIONS TO SCOTTISH LITERATURE

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The International Companion to Lewis Grassic Gibbon

Edited by Scott Lyall

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To Gill

Series Editors' Preface

When in 2009 the first of the series of *Companions to Scottish Literature* under our editorship appeared under the aegis of the Edinburgh University Press, we had a vision of the scope and range of the series which extended to nineteen potential volumes, some based on literary periods, some on overarching themes and some on specific authors. As the years passed, other topics were recognised and added. By 2013, fifteen volumes in the series had appeared, but Edinburgh University Press had also decided that it no longer wanted to continue publishing new titles in the series. We remain grateful to them for their support for those first volumes and the community of Scottish literature scholars and lovers worldwide must be grateful to the Association for Scottish Literary Studies, which after reviewing the position, decided to take on completing the original vision for the series under the aegis of its academic imprint, Scottish Literature International. After the gap of a year to manage transitional matters, the 2015 tranche, therefore, represents under the series title, *International Companions to Scottish Literature*, the continuing fulfilment of the series editors' original vision, with the welcome addition of further topics. These will take the number of volumes produced well beyond twenty.

The 2015 tranche includes two volumes originally envisaged: the thematic volume on Scottish Poetry edited by Carla Sassi, which complements the 2011 volume edited by Ian Brown on Scottish Drama, and the volume on Edwin Morgan, edited by Alan Riach. The third volume, on Lewis Grassic Gibbon, edited by Scott Lyall, is an addition to the original vision, and one highly appropriate. Gibbon studies have developed strongly in recent years and this Companion is much needed.

As readers will see, these volumes continue to attract contributors of international standing and the highest quality. From the start, we have argued the complexity and profundity of the issues that Scottish literature embodies and addresses. The editors and authors of the 2015 volumes

play a full part in helping fulfil the vision with which the series in its initial form began, to problematise in the most positive and creative way any easy notion of what Scottish literature is. The generic and linguistic complexity of the poets, poet-playwright and novelist these volumes address illustrates that vision.

Ian Brown
Thomas Owen Clancy

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A Brief Biography of Lewis Grassic Gibbon

Lewis Grassic Gibbon is perhaps celebrated most as author of *Sunset Song* (1932), the first novel of *A Scots Quair*, his internationally acclaimed trilogy, which also includes *Cloud Howe* (1933) and *Grey Granite* (1934). Born James Leslie Mitchell in 1901 into a crofting family in Auchterless, Aberdeenshire, he wrote eleven books solely under his real name, but became more famous for the Scots fiction of his pseudonym (partly derived from his mother's maiden name) Lewis Grassic Gibbon.

The family moved when he was eight to the Howe of the Mearns, in northeast Scotland, the land Gibbon was to immortalise in *Sunset Song*. He was educated at Arbuthnott Village School, before going on to Mackie Academy in Stonehaven, but left there after a year to become a cub reporter in Aberdeen with the *Aberdeen Journal*. In Aberdeen in 1917, the year of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the future author of *Spartacus* (1933) became a member of the new Aberdeen Soviet. Two years later, in 1919, he moved to Glasgow to work for the *Scottish Farmer*, but was sacked following a scandal over his expenses – money which he had used for radical political ends. After a failed suicide attempt, and with no hope of any journalistic references, Mitchell went back to the Mearns, but he felt restricted at home and refused to become a crofter. He joined the Royal Army Service Corps and for four years, until 1923, served in the Middle East – Mesopotamia, Palestine and Egypt – in a period of travel and experience that was to have an immensely influential bearing on his fiction and beliefs. On his discharge from the army a destitute Mitchell joined the Royal Air Force, in which he served as a clerk until 1929 and during which time he married Rebecca 'Ray' Middleton, whose family were Mearns neighbours of the Mitchells. Upon leaving the RAF he settled down to full-time writing, moving with his wife and two children to Welwyn Garden City in Hertfordshire, where he died in 1935 from peritonitis, still not thirty-four years old.

Introduction

Scott Lyall

The film release of the Terence Davies-directed *Sunset Song* marks perhaps the pinnacle of popular international recognition for Lewis Grassic Gibbon's 1932 novel.[1] In Scotland, *Sunset Song* has for long been identified as a classic. The novel was adapted for television by BBC Scotland in 1971 and has had several stage revivals, most notably by that in 1993 of the playwright Alastair Cording. A set text in many Scottish secondary schools, *Sunset Song* was voted Scotland's favourite book in 2005.[2] In some ways, though, this plaudit remains an enigma. Why would a novel about a young girl growing to maturity on a Kincardineshire farm in the early part of the twentieth century be more popular than, say, the cool urban edginess of Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993), the childhood adventure romance of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883) or *Kidnapped* (1886), or the mature emotional inscapes explored in the work of A. L. Kennedy?

In a chapter discussing emigration in his influential *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People*, David Craig, writing in 1961 before the more recent popularity of *Sunset Song*, declares that 'nostalgia pervades through and through Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*'.[3] Craig speculates that James Leslie Mitchell, 'an *émigré* in London, writing just before his early death, is possessed by nostalgia for the countryside of his birth', giving vent to this homesick longing in *A Scots Quair*, first published as a trilogy in 1946, comprising *Sunset Song* (1932), *Cloud Howe* (1933) and *Grey Granite* (1934), and written under the penname Lewis Grassic Gibbon.[4] Craig argues that nostalgia 'is given good grounds by some of the main actions' in *Sunset Song*, such as 'the break-up of the farm community which loses its men to the Great War, its woods to the timber profiteers', but that in *Cloud Howe* nostalgia 'swamps all firmness of feeling' and that by *Grey Granite*, the concluding novel of the *Quair*, nostalgic emotionalism 'is decidedly out of control'.[5] It is significant that immediately prior to his

discussion of Gibbon, Craig focuses on J. M. Barrie's *A Window in Thrums*. Barrie's 1889 short-story cycle, centred on the fictional town of Thrums, is one of the chief exemplars of Kailyard fiction, a hugely popular late-nineteenth century genre located in small-town Scotland before the spread of industrialisation eradicated cottage industries such as weaving. The Kailyard has been accused of sentimentalising small-town Scottish life, recreating a bygone age of idyllic rural communities during a period when Scotland was actually becoming steadily more heavily urbanised and industrial,[6] and the manner in which Craig manages to combine *A Window in Thrums* and *A Scots Quair* under the rubric of emigrant nostalgia for a simpler, slower way of life may give the clue to the continuing contemporary popularity of *Sunset Song*. If so, this misses many of the points of what that nostalgia may be *for*: community in an atomised era of capitalist individualism; reconnection with a particularly traumatic period of Scottish history – the Great War – and the need to retell that trauma in order to make greater sense of it; and sheer peasant endurance and decency in the face of the greed and bullying of land-owners and other proprietors – something that Scots of all classes may, mistakenly or not, mythologise as a particular national virtue. Nostalgia per se, on these terms at any rate, is neither mawkish nor reactionary, and the importance of *Sunset Song* lies in its brilliant rendering for a wide readership of a period of acute historical liminality, a feature it shares in common with another immensely popular text of *English* regional life, Laurie Lee's *Cider with Rosie*.

Lee's 1959 fictive memoir of his boyhood in a Cotswold village around the time of the First World War shows perhaps an even greater nostalgia than that of *Sunset Song* for a world where 'the horse was king' and the death of which spells 'the end of a thousand years' life'.[7] For Lee's narrator, the task is to reconnect readers to 'the beliefs of generations who had been in this valley since the Stone Age' and from which, in this emergent modern age of the machine, 'continuous contact has at last been broken, the deeper caves sealed off for ever'.[8] The comparison with Lee is valuable in another respect, however, in that both Lee and Gibbon were political radicals. But whereas Lee experienced, during the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), the first international testing-ground of political radicalism in the twentieth century, documented movingly in *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning* (1969) and *A Moment of War* (1991), Gibbon would die in 1935, a year before the war began. Nonetheless, Gibbon is, throughout his fiction, intensely aware of the coming European and international crises, given expression in the Spanish War and then in the conflagration of the Second World War, and it is odd that David Craig, a Marxist critic,

fails to see that Gibbon's work, whether that written under his own name, J. Leslie Mitchell, or as Grassic Gibbon, can be read as a warning of the approaching dangers of fascism and disgust at the wider depredations of capitalism. *A Scots Quair* – too often read in narrowly Scottish terms, a mistake made by Craig – is Gibbon's bid to connect Scottish experience in his own time with that of then-current European political developments and, as explored in this volume by Timothy C. Baker's chapter, the longer diffusion of world history.

Gibbon is a writer who, due to his short life, is especially locatable in a specific time period and historical moment: the 1920s and, more particularly, the so-called crisis of Western civilisation during the 1930s. This is not to say that his work has dated, however. The essays in *The International Companion to Lewis Grassic Gibbon* present Gibbon as a radical political author, powerfully relevant to his own time and our own. Gibbon's contemporary relevance was acknowledged by the left-wing writer, intellectual, film-maker and activist Tariq Ali when, at a talk given to the Radical Independence Campaign at the University of Glasgow in 2014, he called *A Scots Quair* 'a masterpiece of world literature'.[9] Equally, Gerard Carruthers says of *A Scots Quair* that 'Gibbon's narrative voice represents both a usage of literary Scots as mature as any in history, while being also one of the triumphs of British modernism'.[10] It is certainly simplest to place Lewis Grassic Gibbon in a Scottish context, or – and this is not entirely the same thing – within contexts that prioritise the work he wrote under his pseudonym, especially due to the popularity and prominence within his oeuvre of *Sunset Song*. Fearing it could turn to fascism, Gibbon was cynical about the cultural nationalism of the modern Scottish Renaissance; this he expressed most forcefully in his essay 'Glasgow' from *Scottish Scene*, a book co-authored with the poet Hugh MacDiarmid in 1934. In a letter written to the communist and Scottish nationalist MacDiarmid the year previously, he asks: 'is communism compatible with nationalism? And what about those Scots Fascists we talked about, abominable breed?'[11] The Scottish political contexts of Gibbon's work and thought are examined here by Christopher Silver, who argues that Gibbon's relationship with the national movement of the day, and his subsequent influence on Scottish nationalist politics, is far more complex than would be suggested by his ostensibly anti-nationalist position. Indeed, Gibbon was central, along with MacDiarmid, Willa and Edwin Muir, Neil M. Gunn, Catherine Carswell, Nan Shepherd, Fionn Mac Colla and many others, to the movement for cultural and political revival in the early decades of the twentieth century, which can

now be understood as a form of Scottish Modernism.[12] First and foremost, and like other Modernisms, the Scottish literary renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s sought the mythic renewal of aspects of personal and national experience desacralised by the ravages of the First World War, the expansion of capitalism and the machine age, and, most particularly in the Scottish context, the virtual evaporation of a cultural territory that might best be described as inimitably local (rather than regional or national). Several chapters in this book acknowledge the importance of history to *A Scots Quair*, and the circularity of historical and narrative patterning within the trilogy. *A Scots Quair* is about endings and new beginnings and the manner in which these are inextricably related – as they are also in other Modernist texts, such as T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1943), for instance. As the sun sets on the peasant way of life of northeast Scotland at the close of the First World War, an international event that intruded destructively upon the local, a new conception of a radical political internationalism begins to emerge to challenge a war-bound and hierarchical civilisation. Yet what will develop into the communist internationalism of Ewan in *Grey Granite* is continually offset by the local rootedness of his mother Chris and, if this localism is increasingly vulnerable in the modern world – and it arguably is so, too, through the revolutionary aims of Ewan's politics – it is continually reinscribed in the methods and presiding themes of *A Scots Quair* itself, which uses many of the Scots words lamented as disappearing in this period and eulogises the very land Gibbon's characters must leave.

A Scots Quair and the Grassic Gibbon persona somewhat obscure Mitchell's other works, which, despite his obsession with the ancient past and the beginnings of civilisation, often bristle with Modernist resonance and an even more contemporary postcolonial aura. The contexts of Mitchell's work are several: he utilised various genres, in work ranging widely over different places and times, from the ancient Roman Empire of *Spartacus* (1933), the Egyptian desert in *The Lost Trumpet* (1932), the world travels of the great explorers of *Nine Against the Unknown* (1934), to the London of the 1920s depicted in *Stained Radiance* (1930), the Niger of Mungo Park, and the disappeared Mayan civilisation of *The Conquest of the Maya* (1934). Yet, as Carla Sassi argues in this volume, the kaleidoscopic variety of Mitchell's interests and literary identities has been somewhat flattened by the critical precedence given to *A Scots Quair*, in particular through an angle of enquiry that has been concertedly national (and so perhaps, by implication, nationalist). It can of course be argued that Mitchell himself invited this position by adopting the

Gibbon pseudonym for his 'Scottish' work, that which has a Scottish setting and often employs Scots language usages, such as the novels of *A Scots Quair* and the short stories 'Greenden' (1932), 'Smeddum' (1933), 'Clay' (1933), 'Sim' (1933) and 'Forsaken' (1934), as well as his 1934 biography of the Scottish explorer Mungo Park, while he had written as Mitchell fiction and non-fiction with largely non-Scottish subject-matter. This has allowed critics (as do some in this volume) to use the shorthand terminology of Mitchell's 'English' and Gibbon's 'Scottish' work, a national opposition further encouraged by the divide Chris Guthrie discerns in her own personality in *Sunset Song*:

> So that was Chris and her reading and schooling, two Chrisses there were that fought for her heart and tormented her. You hated the land and the coarse speak of the folk and learning was brave and fine one day; and the next you'd waken with the peewits crying across the hills, deep and deep, crying in the heart of you and the smell of the earth in your face, almost you'd cry for that, the beauty of it and the sweetness of the Scottish land and skies. You saw their faces in firelight, father's and mother's and the neighbours', before the lamps lit up, tired and kind, faces dear and close to you, you wanted the words they'd known and used, forgotten in the far-off youngness of their lives, Scots words to tell to your heart how they wrung it and held it, the toil of their days and unendingly their fight. And the next minute that passed from you, you were English, back to the English words so sharp and clean and true – for a while, for a while, till they slid so smooth from your throat you knew they could never say anything that was worth the saying at all.[13]

The existential duality encountered by Chris is one encouraged by an anglicising Scottish educational system which seeks to homogenise linguistic markers of Scottishness into Standard English, wittily explored by Gibbon throughout *A Scots Quair* and expertly analysed here by Hanne Tange. The university subject-area of Scottish Literature has often been keen to resist such standardisation, yet, in relation to Gibbon, the emphasis on his 'Scottish' work has created a false (national) dichotomy at the heart of his oeuvre. H. G. Wells, an early inspiration for Mitchell examined in the final chapter, believed that the Scot had 'complicated his own publicity by writing some of his books under an assumed name'.[14] Equally, the adoption of a penname has also complicated the critical reception of both Mitchell's and Gibbon's work, casting Mitchell's work as 'English' in a Scottish critical framework, and so arguably marginalising it, while

his 'Scottish' work as Gibbon fails to gain the attention it deserves elsewhere, especially, as Morag Shiach points out in her chapter on Gibbon and Modernism, in wider British or Anglo-American considerations of Modernism and writing of the 1930s.

One key context that is shared by both Mitchell's and Gibbon's work is the anthropological theory of Diffusionism. In seeking to explain the origins of civilisation, Diffusionist anthropologists believed that rather than emerging coincidentally in separate places across the globe, civilisation began in one spot – the Nile Valley – and diffused abroad through human migration. One of Gibbon's chief Diffusionist gurus, G. Elliot Smith, argued in 1933 that

> The evidence in substantiation of the claim that agriculture, irrigation, calendar-making, the use of metals, carpentry, stoneworking, architecture, shipbuilding, the kingship, animal symbolism, totemism, flags were invented in Egypt does not consist so much in the circumstances that earlier evidence of their practice has been preserved in Egypt as in the fact that the natural conditions which suggested and made possible these developments are found there and nowhere else.[15]

It is 'the practice of mummification' and the 'widespread distribution of typically Egyptian types of embalming in Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia, and America' that for Elliot Smith provided the proof of Egypt's seminality at the beginnings of civilisation.[16] Gibbon, like others in the 1930s, believed that modern civilisation was crisis-ridden and sick, but whereas many left-wing writers of the period turned to communism as a panacea for capitalist ills, Gibbon's faith lay primarily in Diffusionism, in particular his Diffusionist-inspired belief in a theory of human origins that regarded humanity as originally good but now trapped by the evolution of civilisation's warped codes. In this, Gibbon's thinking bears similarities to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's famous credo from *The Social Contract* (1762): 'Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains'.[17] Rousseau's political philosophy would help instigate the French Revolution in 1789, but in earlier works such as *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts* (1750) and *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755) he looked back speculatively to a time of human freedom before the bonds of civilisation were forged. This mythopoetic interest in a pre-civilisation Golden Age held particular fascination for Gibbon. If humanity was once free it could be so again, not by fiddling with the mechanics of civilisation, which is anyway based on a malign, Hobbesian conception of human nature as savage and as

something therefore to be tamed, but by dispensing altogether with civilisation in its current form in favour of what Uwe Zagratzki in his chapter on Gibbon's politics sees as libertarian and anarchistic freedom. Belief in a Golden Age may sound naive, utopian or backward-looking, but in what Thomas Linehan identifies as the late-nineteenth century 'revival period' it provided inspiration for many on the Left.[18] Linehan identifies 'the "Golden Age" myth' as consisting in

> [T]he strong sense that the present age was decadent, an urge for a new beginning, the yearning for 'Being' over 'Becoming', the search for archaic sources of regeneration as in the recourse to myth, the creative fusion of 'forwards and backwards' as in the origin myth and the heady expectation of an imminent return to an earlier state of bliss.[19]

This is an apt description of the guiding political impetus behind Gibbon's work. Diffusionism in Gibbon's hands, especially marked in his science fiction, a genre examined in my own chapter, takes us backwards (and forwards) to prehistoric hunter-gatherers – as if seeking to reverse the Enlightenment stadial theory of history – and links Gibbon's work to utopian socialists such as Edward Carpenter and William Morris, as well as to a Romantic poet such as Shelley, identified here by Ryan D. Shirey as a key influence on Gibbon.

Lewis Grassic Gibbon remains a radical writer. While Glenda Norquay in her chapter points to some of the criticisms of Gibbon as a potentially feminist writer, she argues that these can and should be rebutted. Gibbon, alive at a major crisis for capitalism and staunchly opposed to that economic system and to militarism, was an internationalist and self-proclaimed cosmopolitan who became best known for his portrayal of the changing face of the Scottish countryside; indeed, his depiction of the ultimate significance of the land to human life might now be regarded as suggesting a 'green' politics. If a nostalgic idea of Gibbon still clings in some realms, this book seeks to trouble any continuing couthy view of his work and its aims. A great prose stylist in *A Scots Quair*, an ardent experimenter in numerous other works, Lewis Grassic Gibbon is a writer who quested after radical forms of authenticity.

A Note on Names

Lewis Grassic Gibbon was the more famous pseudonym of the man and author James Leslie Mitchell. I have, as volume editor, allowed each

contributor to adopt a practice with regard to this elusive identity as appropriate to their chapter's themes. Most of the chapters, as well as the volume title, standardise the author's name to Gibbon, even when discussing work written under the name Mitchell. There are, of course, objections to this method, as the Introduction has made clear, but the practice has been followed by most contributors in order to avoid confusion. Please consult the Further Reading for an accurate list of which books were written by Mitchell and Gibbon.

CHAPTER ONE

Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Modernism

Morag Shiach

> 'What's wrong with the other moderns is the lack of purpose in their infernal books.'[1]

This chapter provides a distinctive critical and historical framework for understanding key linguistic, stylistic and formal elements of Lewis Grassic Gibbon's writing. In doing this it reads him as a Modernist writer.[2] It begins by focusing on Gibbon's novels' formal and stylistic relations to other Modernist writings, while arguing his distinctive sense of literary and historical purpose inflects his Modernism in quite specific ways. This distinctive sense is related to the innovative ways Gibbon embodies historical rhythms and patterns in his novels, creates a narrative voice both local in texture and epic in scope, and explores how historical and political agency are imaginable in the modern world. To understand the innovative quality of the formal and narrative strategies Gibbon develops to represent historical change's energies and patterns first requires consideration of the theories of history that shaped his literary writings, particularly those associated with the Diffusionist movement. This chapter also considers Gibbon's ideas and stylistic innovations in relation to the work of other Modernist writers with a strong interest in history, to demonstrate how far he can be understood as part of, but different from, this broader literary Modernism.

Having considered these affiliations between Gibbon and Modernism, the chapter examines the material conditions under which the distinctive national and modern voice of Mitchell/Gibbon was produced and circulated in the 1920s and 1930s. It looks at the economic circumstances in which he was working, the networks on which he drew, and the space he carved out through the creation of the figure of 'Lewis Grassic Gibbon' as a modern Scottish writer. Moving thus to a more materialist form of criticism allows reflection on both the role of the literary marketplace

within Modernism and the formation of critical categories that render innovative forms of writing readable by a variety of publics. It also establishes the critical hierarchies shaping these publics' reception of literary works, focusing on the historical contexts of Gibbon's texts' production and circulation that enabled his fashioning as a Modernist Scottish writer.

Modernism, civilisation and history

Gibbon's novelistic writing negotiates two distinct temporalities, related on the one hand to the shape and rhythm of individual lives and on the other to historical time's much longer rhythms.[3] Both *Sunset Song* (1932) and *The Speak of the Mearns* (1982), posthumously published, explore northeast Scotland's particular cultural and geographical landscapes in the early years of the twentieth century, offering compelling individual portraits of constrained but purposeful lives. They do this, however, explicitly within the context of a much longer historical time, reaching back to a remote ancient age of myth. Both novels start in very similar ways, with a succinct and stylised history of the origins of modern Scotland: *Sunset Song* begins, 'Kinraddie lands had been won by the Norman childe, Cospatric de Gondeshil, in the days of William the Lyon', while *The Speak of the Mearns* opens 'when the Romans came marching up into Scotland away far back in the early times'.[4] These framings of the modern moment within a much longer history of civilisation's development feature consistently in Gibbon's work, whether writing under his pseudonym or his original name, James Leslie Mitchell. They also resonate interestingly with a range of other Modernist writers' concerns.

Gibbon's interest in civilisations' history began young: his reading of Charles Darwin and Thomas Henry Huxley gave him what he found a compelling account of social and biological evolution.[5] This interest developed a sharper focus when he later encountered the ideas of the Diffusionist school of anthropology, ideas he was to propagate actively from the late 1920s on across his fictional and non-fictional writings. Diffusionism was a current of thought developed across anthropology, archaeology, cultural history and cognate disciplines in the early years of the twentieth century. It advanced the view that all civilisations across the globe had developed from one original civilisation. For the Diffusionists this was ancient Egypt. They argued that crucial developments, like the working of metal, the development of agriculture and even eventually industrialisation, could all be traced back to ancient Egypt. Grafton Elliot Smith's *The Ancient Egyptians and the Origin of Civilisation* (1911) was

one of the earliest texts to make this argument, while W. J. Perry's *The Children of the Sun: A Study in the Early History of Civilisation* (1923) developed its polemical thrust and its claims' magnitude even more emphatically.

Egypt's culture and history were sources of fascination for many Modernist writers in the 1920s, brought to prominence by the 1922 discovery of Tutankhamun's nearly intact tomb and the extensive press coverage surrounding it. One might certainly understand Diffusionism's significant cultural impact in the 1920s within the context of this broader cultural interest in Egyptology. Yet, Gibbon's own interest in Diffusionism was also more personal, shaped and reinforced by the time he had spent in Egypt with the military. His letters in this period clearly demonstrate these new cultures and landscapes' impact on his thinking and imagination.[6] Egypt's spaces and histories gave Gibbon a place from which to understand and represent what he increasingly came to believe were his own society's – and indeed modern civilisation's – failures more broadly. If for Gibbon, as Jeremy Idle suggests, 'Egypt is where man's downfall occurred, where history was born, from where civilisation was "diffused"', then this Diffusionist narrative provides both explanation of his contemporary world's negative aspects and alternative space in and through which to imagine a different logic of freedom.[7]

This fascination with a larger temporal framework which can offer the consolation of a discernible pattern within what might otherwise seem a terrifyingly chaotic modern moment connects Gibbon centrally to the energies and the imagery of literary Modernism. Many Modernist writers sought in history's rhythms and forms some kind of framework to represent their contemporary world's fragmentary and complex particularities. Reading historical processes, individual lives, and sometimes cosmic or astronomical structures as structurally connected was a common strategy, enabling larger patterns to be discerned and broader arguments made.

Thus, for example, Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1918–23) sought to identify the 'series of stages which must be traversed, and traversed moreover in an ordered and obligatory sequence', that for Spengler underpinned history's logic.[8] Similarly, Georges Sorel, whose historical and philosophical *Reflections on Violence* were translated from the original French by the Modernist critic and poet T. E. Hulme in 1914, engaged with a range of philosophical and political thinkers to generate a broader understanding of history's determining shape and logic. Sorel's first major book, *The Trial of Socrates* (1889), had argued Socratic reason's

regressive impact on Greek, and consequently on all following, civilisation. It thus staged an argument about civilisations' decline that anticipated the Diffusionists' arguments that were to prove so important for Gibbon.[9] As Alice Burley has noted, Diffusionism was also important for T. S. Eliot, who suggested a relationship between his own Modernist poetry and Diffusionist ideas when he argued the writings of Perry and Elliot Smith were 'of interest and importance to every student or practitioner of the arts as indeed they should be to everyone who would pay attention to the history and the future of the human race'.[10]

W. B. Yeats is arguably the most striking example of a Modernist writer seeking to represent history's rhythms and patterns in order to understand civilisations' ebb and flow and the modern world's violent and chaotic nature. Through the form and concept of the gyre, Yeats sought to represent a pattern rendering history legible and individual psychology comprehensible: 'the mind, whether expressed in history or in the individual life, has a precise movement, which can be quickened or slackened but cannot be fundamentally altered, and this movement can be expressed by a mathematical form'.[11] Yeats's contemporaries noted the coincidence between this kind of imaginative engagement with history's shape and the work of archaeological Diffusionists. A 1938 review of Yeats's *A Vision* discussed its occult system of psychology and history of philosophy, arguing that the book's 'philosophy of history is of a cyclic pattern not dissimilar to those of [the Diffusionist Flinders] Petrie and Spengler'.[12] Yeats's mapping within *A Vision* of intersecting cycles of cosmology, psychology and history was an artistically and conceptually ambitious undertaking ultimately seeking to make meaning possible and to represent history within modern and Modernist writing.

In his essay 'The Antique Scene' (1934) Gibbon examined civilisations' history, arguing in line with his Diffusionist convictions that 'all human civilisations originated in Ancient Egypt'.[13] However, far from being an origin to celebrate, this starting point represented for Gibbon an uncomfortable kind of birth:

> [T]here arose in a single spot on the earth's surface the urge in men to upbuild for their economic salvation the great fabric of civilisation. Before the planning of that architecture enslaved the minds of men, man was a free and happy and undiseased animal wandering the world […]. And from that central focal point in Ancient Egypt the first civilisers spread across the globe the beliefs and practices, the diggings and plantings and indignations and shadowy revilements of the Archaic Civilisation.[14]

Civilisation's birth also spells the end of liberty. This Diffusionist narrative of civilisation's continuing decline is important for Gibbon's novels' framing of the challenges his modern characters face in establishing meaning and agency within the much shorter temporal framework of their own lives – or, to put it another way, of experiencing freedom.

Gibbon's work encompassed many different civilisations and cultures, but it also focussed specifically on Scotland and in particular on northeast landscape, culture and economy. Setting history in play without being paralysed by its nightmarish qualities is a recurrent concern across the three novels of *A Scots Quair* (1932–34). This concern drives Gibbon to a series of innovative fictional devices. These include the formal structuring of *Sunset Song* through the cyclical rhythm of agricultural labour. This deploys a different imagining of historical time, one perhaps more conducive to the scale and imagination of individual lives. Another device is the very particular use of the pronoun 'you' by a narrative voice seeking constantly to move between individual and collective uses of that pronoun, and build within the narrative world of all three novels of the *Quair* a connection between different subjectivities and temporalities that, at the level of action within the novels, seems almost never possible.

In *Sunset Song* the resolution of the dialectic between history's painful logic and its characters' recalcitrant, if impossible, hopes is offered in elegiac mode. The novel begins and ends with a section called 'The Unfurrowed Field', an image surely of future potential growth as well as barrenness. In its first incarnation this unfurrowed field opens up to the cycle of the seasons to come, but in its second iteration the same field bears the traumatic marks of war's 'harvest'. The novel ends with the unveiling of a memorial, made up of the stones from 'the old stone circle by Blawearie Loch', again evoking a much longer sense of historical time.[15] The land itself bears the traces of war: 'And faith! the land looked unco and woe with its wood all gone [… and] folk said that the land had gone cold and wet right up to the very Mains'.[16] The minister's sermon identifies the dead of the community with 'the last of the Peasants, the last of the Old Scots folk', his elegiac invoking of this legacy followed by the playing of 'Flowers of the Forest' on the pipes, a tune by tradition played only at funerals or memorial services.[17] We are offered two very different temporalities though which to understand what is finally represented as the tragic quality of that unfurrowed field, in terms either of an ancient peasant civilisation's death, or as catastrophe caused by a much more recent and violent conflict. In both timeframes the poignant invocation of loss is the dominant mood, despite the minister's brave

attempt to suggest that 'beyond it and us there shines a greater hope and a newer world'.[18]

In *Grey Granite* (1934) the relations between individual and history come into sharper focus. The novel is dedicated to Hugh MacDiarmid, who by the time of its writing had established a clear sense of his historical commitment to revolutionary politics.[19] The novel's setting is industrial, its organising framework not the seasons that framed the agricultural labour of *Sunset Song* but rather a set of rock-forming minerals commonly found within granite: epidote, sphene, apatite and zircon. Their hardness and brittleness function metaphorically to evoke both the hardening of alienated individuals within industrialisation's landscapes and the sharpness required of anyone seeking to challenge and overcome this dehumanising culture, ideas also found in MacDiarmid's 'On A Raised Beach', published in the 1934 collection *Stony Limits*. Gibbon thus within this novel once more crafts a metaphorical space that generates energy and dynamism by counterposing and also uniting different kinds of natural forces. In this case he brings together both granite's hardness and a gemstone's iridescence into an image persistently posing the question of the relations between the concrete and the abstract at the level of history as well as the individual. At the end of *Grey Granite* the lights go out and rain beats down on hard stones, creating a kind of shimmering cover to granite's hardness, a resolution of that dialectic that may also evoke death.[20]

The ambiguities of the kinds of hardness examined in the novel are most powerfully explored in relation to Ewan Tavendale's character. He becomes increasingly politicised through involvement in industrial labour organisation and his experiences of police brutality. A work colleague challenges Ewan about what is involved in seeking to assume personally the burden of history in this way, to live fully within historical time: '*A hell of a thing to be History, Ewan!* And for a while his words and the image they painted abided with Ewan'.[21] But the stakes involved in assuming the role of individual agent of historical change had already been made apparent by Ewan's lover, Ellen: '*Anyhow your heart's not in it at all. Only your head and imagination*'.[22] By the novel's end, Ewan's loss of feeling is striking: he is condemned to a struggle he cannot see as ever being finished, a dilemma offering no adequate resolution of the novel's central question about the possibility of living fully within historical time.

Instead, *A Scots Quair* offers a completely different kind of resolution – and temporality – that could perhaps also be described as a moment of epiphany. Fictional use of epiphany within Modernist writing is most

closely associated with James Joyce, who created within his texts epiphanic moments with the capacity to heal historical and subjective rifts in a moment of intensity and affect – such as, for example, the end of the 'The Dead', from the 1914 short story collection *Dubliners*, where Gabriel Conroy's 'soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead'.[23] Gibbon also deploys epiphanic moments, drawing on sensation and emotion's rich complexity within these moments to erase the historical's specific contours in favour of an intense moment of mythic and imaginative coherence, with all of its potential freedoms from time and space. An example is this image of Chris merging with her native landscape at the conclusion to *A Scots Quair*: 'she still sat on as one by one the lights went out and the rain came beating the stones about her, and falling all that night while she still sat there, presently feeling no longer the touch of the rain or hearing the sound of the lapwings going by'.[24] Across the three novels of *A Scots Quair* Gibbon has given aesthetic form to history's rhythms and patterns, created a narrative voice both local in texture and epic in scope, and explored how historical and political agency are imaginable in the modern world. Yet, he leaves us with a very Modernist and unresolved moment of intensity, ambiguity and beauty.

Modernism and the literary marketplace

History is a central concern behind the formal challenge of many Modernist texts, and a specific narrative and thematic focus of Gibbon's novels, most significantly *A Scots Quair*. We now focus on reading both Modernism and certain Gibbon works historically in light of his period's changing literary market place, to ask: 'What kinds of literary marketplace helped bring to light such demanding and difficult texts?'[25]

In recent years critical analyses and scholarly research within Modernist Studies have focused increasingly on the importance of understanding historical conditions that shaped material production and circulation of literary texts in the early years of the twentieth century.[26] At the heart of this focus on literary texts' production and circulation lies a desire to understand the relations between Modernist writers, mass culture, the marketplace and an emerging Modernist readership. The new kinds of relations between these categories established in the 1920s and 1930s have increasingly come to be seen as informing Modernism's distinctive stylistic

and thematic concerns, and as constituting the conditions of possibility for the innovations with which it is so powerfully associated.

Reading Modernism historically is by no means an obvious thing to do. Modernism, as a set of cultural practices within literature, art, music, architecture or film has often resisted periodisation – its beginnings have been discerned as early as the eighteenth century, while its end is still the matter of some debate[27] – and this has generated some reticence in developing historicised accounts of Modernism as a cultural project. However, focussing on the conditions under which Modernist texts were published and circulated, and the economic models Modernist writers developed in the early years of the twentieth century to sustain their writing careers and construct their readerships, has proved a productive approach to the development of a more historicised Modernist criticism. Thus, for example, Lawrence Rainey's *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (1998), with its interest in the economic relations that enabled and shaped the creation and the circulation of Modernist literary texts, was able to make an important argument about the cultural consequences of the conditions under which Modernist texts reached their audiences and acquired both cultural and monetary value.

Rainey argues literary Modernism constructed a new economic model built on three main planks: the role of patronage, the power of 'little magazines', and the dominance of the 'coterie'. All three, Rainey suggests, were sources of cultural and economic value for Modernist writers, allowing them to withdraw consciously both from the public sphere and the rapidly expanding literary marketplace: 'much of the literature that we now designate "modernist" was produced under the aegis of a revived patronage that flourished on a remarkable scale'.[28] Rainey's study has been followed by significant further research by a range of scholars into the ways in which Anglo/American Modernist writers negotiated – or evaded – an increasingly large and segmented literary marketplace and constructed their publics. This has focussed particularly on the role of little magazines in mediating and constituting Modernism's literary culture.[29] Extending this research, this chapter offers a new perspective to readings of Gibbon as a Modernist by examining the ways he negotiated his relations with the literary marketplace, networks of patronage, and some influential coteries as they developed in 1930s Scotland.

Recent studies of the modern Scottish Renaissance arguing for the movement as a distinctively Scottish form of Modernism stress the role of little magazines within it. 'Little magazines' are understood, following Rainey, as particularly significant for the ecology of Modernist publishing,

as indeed 'the "engines" of modernism'.[30] Thus, for example, Margery Palmer McCulloch has written of the importance of little magazines 'in the interwar movement for Scottish renewal',[31] while Alistair McCleery has argued that little magazines played a central role in articulating the relations between modernity and nationhood in Scotland in the twentieth century's earlier years:

> The little magazines acted as a seedbed for new writers and as an outlet for materials more experienced writers could not place elsewhere. They also provided a social forum where writers could make a contribution to the development of civil society in their day. In particular, they set out the stall of a nationalism that could transform Scotland from a complacent, provincial backwater.[32]

This argues for a distinctively national and political role for the little magazine within Scottish literary Modernism. Beyond seeing the little magazine as a site of experimentation and a space for the development of new, and necessarily restricted, readerships for the innovative projects of Modernism, the proliferation of small-circulation specialist literary magazines in Scotland can thus be understood as offering the possibility of new forms of political identity, constituted by new and emerging publics. This account poses a significant challenge to Rainey's proposition that Modernist cultural practice amounted to a kind of withdrawal from the public sphere. As Matthew Luskey argues,

> Scholarship on the rich ephemera of little magazines demonstrates how social, political, material, and economic forces intersect within the pages of small-press periodicals to play a formative role in modernist culture. Recent insights into their historical engagements, sociological habits, marketing techniques, and publishing protocols further reveal the extent to which little magazines often functioned as brief yet defiant public spheres, promoting vanguard movements and providing forums for the initial reception of an artist's work.[33]

It is this extended understanding of the role of the little magazine and the associated role of Rainey's cultural coterie within the ecology of Modernist publishing that can underpin some new insights into Gibbon's negotiation of his emerging identity as a Scottish Modernist writer.

By the early 1930s, Gibbon had already published in various little magazines, which could be argued to have constructed, in Luskey's terms,

'brief yet defiant public spheres'. As James Leslie Mitchell he had published essays both in *The Free Man*, a magazine founded in Edinburgh in 1932 to promote Scottish culture, and in *The Mill Gate*, a magazine established by the Cooperative Movement. As Lewis Grassic Gibbon he had also published his short story 'Greenden', a powerful picture of the human cost of farming, in the *Scots Magazine* in 1932. The *Scots Magazine*, backed by the considerable resources of Dundee-based publishing company D. C. Thomson, was not of course in the usual sense 'little'. Having, however, been 're-founded in 1924 to provide "a high-class literary periodical devoted entirely to Scotland and things Scottish"', it was still a space for a relatively restricted readership with a defined agenda related to cultural change. Thus it was relevant to Gibbon's crafting of a distinct set of cultural spaces for the reception of his Scottish writings.[34]

Gibbon did not, however, restrict himself to little magazines as he tried to establish a financially secure basis for his career as a writer. As he was very aware, '[t]he new and unknown Scots writer facing the publishing, printing world has the usual chances and mischances to face in a greater measure than his English compeer. Firstly, in almost every case, he must seek publication in London'.[35] Writing as James Leslie Mitchell, he was from 1929 a regular contributor to the *Cornhill Magazine*. The *Cornhill Magazine*, established in London in the 1850s by George Murray Smith, son of the highly successful Scottish publisher George Smith, had by the early twentieth century established a large readership and an influential position within British literary culture. Gibbon contributed a range of short stories to the *Cornhill* that established him as an emerging writer, providing some modest financial resources to support his writing. In addition to contributing fiction to the *Cornhill*, he was publishing his work in magazines like *Reynolds Illustrated News* and the archaeological journal *Antiquity*, and, as J. Leslie Mitchell, he had already established a reasonable profile as a novelist by 1931.

Despite this, these years were characterised by 'uneasy early literary experiment and frequent rejection – and the spectre of poverty'.[36] The material conditions of his writing were precarious, and his relation to a distinctively Scottish literary culture still somewhat tenuous. He was publishing in English, in outlets mostly based in London. He, nonetheless, deployed a range of tactics to survive within his contemporary literary marketplace, as well as developing strategies to enable the value of his writings as Lewis Grassic Gibbon to be captured in the future within the more restricted cultural field of Modernist practice. As Ian Campbell notes:

> Mitchell was a scrupulous, organised writer – he solicited work, tried to bargain up offered fees, organised republication in the USA of his successful titles. He also typed his work and kept it neatly, so that when he died his papers were there to be preserved by his widow as his memorial.[37]

Here is a sense of an organised professional, shaping his identity and imagining his legacy.

With the publication of *Sunset Song* in 1932, Gibbon began to achieve a much greater profile as an emerging writer, and specifically an emerging modern Scottish writer. The adoption of the pseudonym Lewis Grassic Gibbon clearly separated this novel from the work of James Leslie Mitchell; the deployment of an innovative literary style and lexicon, engaged in important ways with the Scots language, placed his work within a different critical space. That Lewis Grassic Gibbon was to be understood primarily as a Scottish writer was clear to his early readers: when Compton Mackenzie reviewed *Sunset Song* in the *Daily Mail* he wrote that 'I have no hesitation in saying that *Sunset Song* by Lewis Grassic Gibbon (Jarrolds, 7s 6d) is the richest novel about Scottish life written for many years'.[38] Gibbon had created a persona as a Scottish writer in a quite new way with this novel's publication. This had consequences for the ways he was to craft his relationship to his readers between 1932 and his untimely death in 1935. It also had consequences for his place within literary Modernism, as he repeatedly negotiated the importance to him of a broad European tradition of Modernist innovation as well as a recalcitrant and rooted sense of the particularities of the landscape and language of Scotland.

Scottish Scene, or The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn, is a volume of essays, dramatic sketches, poems and short stories co-written by Gibbon and Hugh MacDiarmid, published in 1934. This volume represents the most significant intervention by Gibbon into Scotland's Modernist literary marketplace, cementing his place within a particular coterie associated with MacDiarmid with the power to confer value on his writing and his broader cultural identity. *Scottish Scene* explicitly claims its significant place within Scotland's literary and political culture in a number of different ways, including through its material fabric. On its original dust jacket are two magnificent lions rampant engaged in a fight as they stand on a bed of thistles, while on the front cover there is also a small but stylish red thistle. The association of these various symbols with Scotland – with a rather combative Scotland at that – is clear. The front matter of the volume includes a brief list of published works by both Gibbon and

MacDiarmid, accompanied by endorsements underlining their importance as Scottish and, more broadly, European writers: Gibbon 'has put himself at the head of the Scottish revival in letters' with 'his strange style', which is, nonetheless, 'beautiful', while MacDiarmid is reputed to be 'the most powerful intellectually and emotionally fertilising force Scotland has known since the death of Burns' and 'one of the few living poets of the European world'. These quotations are designed to situate and legitimate both as Scottish Modernists.

These important endorsements are followed two pages later by three quotations reflecting on Scotland: two comic aphorisms by Compton Mackenzie and the American journalist and novelist Kenneth Roberts, and an unintentionally comic remark about Highlanders by Queen Victoria. Again, this underlines the volume's central engagement with representations of Scotland, and its important bid to transcend previous late-nineteenth-century Kailyard conceptions of the nation. The book is dedicated 'with our affection and admiration' to Helen B. Cruickshank, poet, nationalist, an early member of the Saltire Society when it was founded in 1936 and key supporter of MacDiarmid and Gibbon and a range of other modern Scottish Renaissance writers. The coterie that is being invoked here is, in Scottish terms at least, powerful with the capacity to enhance Gibbon's value as a writer, and specifically a Scottish writer. The volume's table of contents then outlines its basic structure, delineating authorship of Gibbon or MacDiarmid piece by piece and articulating each of its seven sections' contents, including the Prelude, a poem entitled 'Scotland' by MacDiarmid that concludes with the following challenge:

> Now for your futurist faculty then!
> When will Scots people begin to know
> As much about Scotland as ghosts in a fog
> And not care far less? – I thought so![39]

What is at stake in this volume, MacDiarmid suggests, is the Scottish nation's future cultural health.

At the end of this set of preliminary framings of the volume is a brief narrative describing how the collaboration between MacDiarmid and Gibbon enabling the writing and publishing of *Scottish Scene* came about: 'Mr Lewis Grassic Gibbon proposed the scheme of this book to Mr Hugh MacDiarmid', we are told, immediately establishing the credentials of Gibbon as a literary figure of some standing, given that he was able to initiate such a significant collaboration.[40] MacDiarmid's own credentials

as a Scottish Modernist were firmly established by 1934 through his role in the creation and editing of a significant number of little magazines such as *Scottish Chapbook* (1922–3) and *The Scottish Nation* (1923). By being in a position to propose collaboration to MacDiarmid, Gibbon was claiming both cultural authority and a certain artistic lineage.

The description of the terms of Gibbon and MacDiarmid's collaboration stresses finally that *Scottish Scene* was conceived and written separately by the two writers, one of whom – Gibbon, domiciled in Welwyn Garden City – was in 'a pleasant village near London', while MacDiarmid was in Shetland. The writers' geographical separateness will also, we are told, be associated with an important divergence of views and perspectives. As a volume of polemical essays and creative writings, *Scottish Scene* does not seek to offer a unified vision of modern Scotland, and the authors tell us that there are substantial issues on which they disagree. 'Yet perhaps this is rather advantage than disadvantage', Gibbon and MacDiarmid go on to argue, since the variety of angles and perspectives provide the very conditions of possibility of a 'better composite picture' of modern Scotland.[41] This is a very Modernist proposition, evoking the visual practice of collage, or the fragmentation typical of Modernist literary forms, both of which can nonetheless produce a certain aesthetic coherence. The Scottish scene, it would appear, is by its very nature Modernist.

This chapter has argued the 'composite picture' of modern Scotland to be found within Gibbon's writing is a significant part of a broader Modernist project. Though Gibbon is in fact relatively little known within the wider academic space of Modernist Studies, it has sought to demonstrate his work's stylistic and theoretical underpinnings add an important new dimension to analyses of the ways Modernist writers sought to engage history and assuage the fragmentation that seemed to dominate their worlds. This consideration of the ways Gibbon negotiated the intellectual, stylistic and commercial choices he faced as a Scottish Modernist writer in the 1920s and 1930s thus adds to the depth and richness of our understanding of European Modernism.

CHAPTER TWO

Language, Class and Social Power in *A Scots Quair*

Hanne Tange

Language is undoubtedly one of the principal reasons for the lasting appeal of Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *A Scots Quair* (1932–34). In *Sunset Song* (1932), the author himself describes how his language usage might be compared to that of a Dutchman 'mould[ing] his German in some fashion to the rhythms and cadence of the kindred speech that his peasants speak'.[1] By so doing, Gibbon draws our attention to language, motivating then-contemporary and later readers to celebrate his achievement of a distinctively Scottish voice.[2] Gibbon's idiosyncratic style has prompted some literary historians to categorise the author as a cultural nationalist, thus placing him in the group of other modern Scottish Renaissance writers such as Hugh MacDiarmid and Neil M. Gunn.[3] Yet his essays in *Scottish Scene* (1934), such as this from 'Glasgow', leave little doubt as to what side Gibbon would position himself on if requested to choose between political internationalism and cultural nationalism:

> I think there's the chance that Scotland, especially in its Glasgow, in its bitter straitening of the economic struggle, may win to a freedom preparatory to, and in alignment with, that cosmopolitan freedom, long before England: so a cosmopolitan opportunist, I am some kind of Nationalist. But I'd rather, any day, be an expatriate writing novels in Persian about the Cape of Good Hope than a member of a homogeneous literary cultus [i.e., the Scottish Renaissance Movement].[4]

Gibbon's declared willingness to adopt Persian, while perhaps tongue-in-cheek, provides an interesting insight into his attitude to language. As a Modernist writer he employs a range of linguistic experimentation, which is evidenced by the way that he reworks English in *Persian Dawns, Egyptian Nights* (1932) and *Spartacus* (1933).[5] At the same time he expresses

an awareness of the fact that some languages have a wider scope than others, and that the artist can use this to his or her advantage. So in the note to *Sunset Song* Gibbon concludes: 'The courtesy that the hypothetical Dutchman might receive from German a Scot may invoke from the great English tongue.'[6] Hence the author acknowledges the status of Scots as a variety or dialect within the scope of the 'English tongue', and yet asserts his right, as a native of Scotland, to use native idioms and phrases to achieve effects unavailable in English.

In an attempt to foreground the social meaning of language in Gibbon's writings, this chapter presents a Bourdieusian reading of *A Scots Quair*. In works such as *Distinction* (2007) and *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has described the social dynamics of a class society, highlighting among other things the differential power of cultural consumption, aesthetic taste and educational choice. In *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991) Bourdieu underlines the connection between language, class and social status, suggesting that individual actors' ability to rise in society will depend on their command of specific linguistic repertoires. Arguably, a similar linguistic argument is put forward in Gibbon's *A Scots Quair* where key characters confront a choice between a Scots vernacular linked to the rural world and a Standard English that offers the prospect of social mobility through education. Following an initial comparison of the two writers' personal backgrounds, the chapter will underline the social meaning of language in *A Scots Quair* by examining the four linguistic positions of community, institutions, nation and Cosmopolis.

More than anything, it is the shared experience of provincialism that draws the attention of Gibbon and Bourdieu to the differential power of language. They were born in the periphery of a centralised British and French state and acquired as their first language a regional dialect that deviated from the linguistic norm recognised by the educational system.[7] In order to move upwards in the social hierarchy it was urgent for both to unlearn the speech that stamped them as provincials and thus socially inferior, and replace this with an educated, middle-class voice. The principal institution involved in this process of linguistic standardisation was the school. To a large extent Bourdieu's theory on language seems to reflect his personal encounter with the French educational system, where he learnt to refine his written and spoken language until he had mastered the sophisticated discourse expected from a member of the intellectual elite. Similarly, Gibbon's years at Stonehaven Academy would

have underlined to him the connection between a mastery of Standard English and admittance into the middle class. In *Sunset Song,* Gibbon uses Chris Guthrie to reflect on this experience:

> Chris loitered on the road in the tail of the hasting scholars, the little things they were, all legs and long boots, funny how they tried to speak English one to the other, looking sideways as they cried the words to see if folk thought them gentry. Had Marget and she been as daft as that?[8]

The provincial perspective heightens Gibbon's and Bourdieu's linguistic awareness for two reasons. First, their attention is drawn to the fact that reality is multilingual and that actors' language choice will depend on contextual factors such as place, time and participation. Second, they acknowledge that some discourses carry more weight than others, which means that the linguistic situation can be compared to a hierarchy where the variants of English and French that are associated with the social and national elite are placed at the top, whereas regional or working-class accents rank lower. Building on the anthropological fieldwork summarised in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) and *The Logic of Practice* (1990), Bourdieu develops such experience into a sociological theory of language. At the centre is the concept of a linguistic market, which Bourdieu defines in *Language and Symbolic Power*:

> Utterances receive their value (and their sense) only in their relation to a market, characterised by a particular law of prize formation. The value of the utterance depends on the relation of power that is concretely established between speakers' linguistic competences, understood both as their capacity for production and as their capacity for appropriation and appreciation; it depends, in other words, on the capacity of the various agents involved in the exchange to impose the criteria of appreciation most favourable to their own products.[9]

The key point is the link established between language and social status. Bourdieu describes a linguistic economy in which centralised institutions such as school, church and government promote the use of certain regional and social dialects at the expense of others and thereby install in language users the sense that a position of social and cultural power requires adherence to a specific linguistic norm. Scholars learn this at an early age because schoolteachers reward them on the basis of their ability to conform to the standards of, say, Oxbridge English or Parisian French.

Yet this process of social domination is only possible because all participants within the linguistic market recognise some varieties as superior. In theory, Bourdieu accepts the possibility that a social group can challenge the linguistic norm of the elite, and, if such a claim is backed up by sufficient economic, cultural and political resources, it may eventually change the power balance within the linguistic market.[10] Undoubtedly, this was the kind of change imagined by Hugh MacDiarmid when he called for a Scottish Renaissance in the 1920s.[11] However, given the role of institutions such as the school or church in disseminating the idea of standard language, most actors participating in negotiations within the linguistic market will reproduce pre-established social roles and relationships, accepting as normal the constraints imposed by the linguistic hierarchy.

From Bourdieu's theory of language we can derive three possible linguistic positions: the localised voice of the rural community (for example, the Mearns or Béarn, the native regions of Gibbon and Bourdieu); the institutionalised voice associated with the school, church or public offices; and the national standard associated with members of the economic and socio-cultural elite. In order to account fully for Gibbon's language usage, however, we need to include a fourth position, namely the cosmopolitan. A theoretical account of world language or lingua franca has been provided by the Belgian sociolinguist Jan Blommaert in *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*, which acknowledges that certain languages, notably English, have a function beyond the nation state and thereby become universal in scope and meaning.[12] The analysis will examine each of these perspectives in some detail, underlining to what extent we find in Gibbon's literary landscape a Bourdieusian link between language, class and social power. The balance between the different sections reflect the author's priorities in *A Scots Quair*, which means that most attention is paid to the community, institutional and national positions, whereas the fourth, cosmopolitan view is dealt with more superficially.

The community position may be defined as the provincial 'speak' that is accepted within a small community such as Kinraddie, but questioned once characters attempt to move across regional or social boundaries. In terms of language usage, it is represented by a localised, vernacular voice that can be linked to a specific place, and examples are the anonymous crofter who introduces the history and geography of Kinraddie in *Sunset Song*, the Segget gossiper who spreads the news of the burghers' wrongdoings in *Cloud Howe* (1933), and the apprentice, Bob, who provides a personal perspective on working-class life in *Grey Granite* (1934). What

is shared by these narrative voices is their extensive use of colloquialisms that make it possible to place the speakers within a particular regional and social landscape. According to both Ian Campbell and John Corbett, Gibbon achieves such localisation through the incorporation of Scottish terms and the choice of a distinctively un-English prose rhythm, which might suggest an attempt on behalf of the author to express an emotional attachment to his home region and country.[13] A passage that would support this interpretation is the scene at Chris's wedding where Long Rob reflects on the decline of the 'Scotch' language:

> But Rob was just saying what a shame it was that folk should be shamed nowadays to speak Scotch – or they called it Scots if they did, the split-tongued sourocks! Every damned little narrow-dowped rat that you met put on the English if he thought he'd impress you – as though Scotch wasn't good enough now, it had words in it that the thin bit scraichs of the English could never come at. And Rob said *You can tell me, man, what's the English for sotter, or greip, or smore, or pleiter, gloaming or glunching or well-kenspeckled?*[14]

The passage is significant for three reasons. First, Rob frames the language discussion within a local rather than a national context, drawing our attention to terms such as 'greip' (gutter or drain, often in a byre) and 'sourock' (sorrel; sour-faced person) that would be part of the everyday vocabulary used by a crofter. Second, Rob relates language to social status rather than nationality, criticising his fellow-Scots for their tendency to accept English because of a personal desire for social advancement. A final point concerns Rob's position within Kinraddie, for unlike the Guthries, who are incomers from Echt, or Chae Strachan, who is characterised as a 'fell wandering billy', Rob is identified as one of the few genuinely native members of the community.[15] Even Rob's localised voice cannot resist change in the long run, however, as we learn in the epilude to *Sunset Song*, where the young narrator dismisses Rob's Scotch tunes as 'daft' and 'old-fashioned'.[16]

As we move into the more fragmented worlds of Segget (*Cloud Howe*) and Duncairn (*Grey Granite*), Gibbon employs a broader range of linguistic repertoires, expressing through language his narrators' social identity and status. Unlike *Sunset Song*, where a localised voice could be used to express solidarity and tradition within the rural community, the varieties of Scots found in *Cloud Howe* and *Grey Granite* identify the speakers as members of the working or lower-middle classes, which again

places them in a position of social inferiority. All groups in society seem equally keen to contribute to the establishment and maintenance of this linguistic hierarchy, as we see in the small-town environment of Segget, where servant and provost alike will evaluate Chris's language usage:

> Chris would stand in the choir and sing, and sometimes look at the page in her hand and think of the days when she at Blawearie had never thought of the kirk at all, over-busied living the life that was *now* to bother at all on the life to come. Others of the choir that had missed a service would say to her with a shy-like smile, *I'm so sorry, Mrs Colquohoun, I was late*; and Chris would say that they needn't fash, if she said it in Scots the women would think, *Isn't that a common-like bitch at the Manse?* If she said it in English the speak would spread round the minister's wife was putting on airs.[17]

In terms of social identification, Chris's predicament in *Cloud Howe* is that her preference for a rural, Scots speech conflicts with other people's perception of her as a member of the town elite. It is significant that this linguistic dilemma is resolved in *Grey Granite* where Chris, now occupying a lower class position, regains the freedom to use Scots and reclaim her social identity as a crofter's daughter.[18] Other characters in *A Scots Quair* that can be said to represent a localised community position are the Segget poet and joiner Ake Ogilvie in *Cloud Howe* and Chris's boarding-house partner Ma Cleghorn in *Grey Granite*. While these characters do not carry a symbolic weight comparable to Long Rob, their linguistic function is significant because it suggests that the use of vernacular speech may be continued within the more modern environments of Segget and Duncairn.[19]

In comparison, the second, institutionalised position can be defined as the particular discourse or sociolect ascribed to the educational system, the church and civic authorities such as the provost, the police or the army. Chris's sense of being trapped between Scots and English underlines the institutional aspect of language, highlighting to what extent individuals' language choice is influenced by the practices sanctioned by public institutions such as the school or the church. In this sense Gibbon's fictional landscape is comparable to Bourdieu's linguistic hierarchy, which distinguishes between, on the one hand, 'the lower classes, particularly the peasantry, [who] were limited to the local dialect' and, on the other, '[t]he members of these local bourgeoisies of priests, doctors, or teachers, who owed their position to their mastery of the

instruments of expression'.[20] That one's ability to claim a higher social position depends on one's command of a specific discourse is stressed from the beginning of *Sunset Song*, where we learn how Mistress Gordon 'tried to speak English and to make her two bit daughters […] speak English as well'.[21] English undoubtedly enjoys a special status within Gibbon's communities, holding out the promise to ambitious mothers and young scholars of the prospect of middle-class status, access to a university education, a professional career and financial independence for able women such as Chris or Marget Strachan. In response to Rob's concern about the decline of Scots, Gordon retorts: '*You can't help it, Rob. If folk are to get on in the world nowadays, away from the ploughshafts and out of the pleiter, they must use the English, orra though it be*'.[22]

Throughout *A Scots Quair* we find among Gibbon's characters a strong awareness of the differential power of speech as well as individuals' need to master Standard English if they want to rise in society. Arguably, this language attitude is promoted by the educational system, which explains why even at a young age Chris is able to distinguish between the social roles related to English and Scots, respectively.[23] At school the scholar who speaks 'proper' English will be rewarded by the teachers, while those who deviate from the institutional norm are corrected. Chris's encounter with the English school inspector describes how such a process of linguistic standardisation might be carried out:

> And then there was French, fair difficult, the u was the worst; and an inspector creature came to Echt and Chris near dropped through the schoolroom floor in shame when he made her stand out in front of them all and say *o-oo, o-oo, o-oo-butin*. And he said *Put your mouth as though you were going to weesel, but don't do it, and say 'o-oo, o-oo, o-oo'*. And she said it, she felt like a hen with a stone in its thrapple, after the inspector creature, an Englishman he was with an awful belly on him and he couldn't say whistle, only weesel.[24]

The school experience instils in Gibbon's characters the sense of a linguistic hierarchy where Standard English is placed near the top, while vernacular Scots is ranked in a lower position. This benchmark is important to the way in which individuals assess other people's performances, which becomes particularly evident in the gossip sections of *Cloud Howe* and *Grey Granite* where the narrators denounce speakers as 'common' or 'putting on airs' if their speech differs from the expectations attached to a specific social role or class. English is accepted as the

proper speech for the laird, minister or teacher, whereas a servant, crofter, spinner, blacksmith or 'keelie' is expected to use the colloquialisms associated with the working or lower-middle classes. All members of society contribute to the preservation and continuation of this hierarchy, and characters attempting to challenge it risk criticism, marginalisation or social exclusion. Hence we see at the beginning of *Cloud Howe* how the Colquohoun's maid Else considers quitting her position at the Manse because she finds Chris hard to relate to, while Meg, Ma Cleghorn's servant girl in *Grey Granite*, observes that 'the way that that Mrs Colquohoun took on, and looked at you cool, put a body off'.[25] Arguably, the two girls respond to the fact that Chris's conduct and speech do not match their expectations, which supports Bourdieu's claim that members of the lower classes also participate in the institutionalisation of a hierarchical social and linguistic order.[26]

In relation to the national position, we may look for examples where Gibbon expresses a sense of national belonging through language, underlining, on the one hand, the creation of an inclusive Scottish 'WE-' identity and, on the other, the exclusion of characters associated with an alternative, English voice.[27] Throughout *A Scots Quair* Gibbon characterises certain types of speech as 'Scotch' or 'English' respectively, and this could be read as symptomatic of the cultural nationalism associated with the modern Scottish Renaissance, which has prompted some critics to emphasise the Scottish dimension to the author's work.[28] Such an interpretation is supported by Gibbon's statements in 'Literary Lights', where on the basis of language he categorises his fellow-novelists Neil M. Gunn and Willa Muir as 'English'.[29] Yet other essays in *Scottish Scene*, such as the already cited 'Glasgow', indicate that Gibbon wants to detach himself from the kind of linguistic nationalism advocated by Hugh MacDiarmid, and, arguably, a similar distance is found in *A Scots Quair*. In order to substantiate this claim, this chapter has examined situations in Gibbon's trilogy that involve some kind of national identification. First, there are a number of scenes where a Scottish narrator categorises a particular language usage as 'English'. In these examples, the Scots narrator will often mock the English accent, as we see in the case of Ellen Johns, whom an anonymous working-class voice describes as 'English, Haw-Haw-Really-Quite'.[30] Yet such English–Scottish distinctions mainly occur in situations where we also have a social divide (for example, the confrontations between the car-driving gentry and the crofters in *Sunset Song*), which implies that the author is using nationality to add to his characters' sense of social and linguistic difference. One of the few situations where

characters explicitly comment on the idea of a national culture and language is in *Grey Granite*, where Archie Clearmont entertains Ewan with news about the Rectorial election at the university:

> Archie thought he'd support the Nationalist. Ewan asked why, and Archie said for a bit of a rag, the Nationalist candidate was Hugo MacDownall, the chap who wrote in Synthetic Scots. Ewan asked *Why synthetic? Can't he write the real stuff?* and Archie said *I'm damned if I know. Sounds more epileptic than synthetic to me – that's why I'm interested, I'm going in for Medicals!*[31]

Grey Granite contains more references to cultural nationalism than any other part of *A Scots Quair*, which suggests that Gibbon might be paying homage to Hugh MacDiarmid, who is the dedicatee of this novel, while lightly satirising him: clearly 'Hugo MacDownall' is meant to be him. Yet the vision of a distinctive Scottish language and culture is voiced by peripheral, middle-class characters such as Archie and Miss Murgatroyd, while dismissed by key figures such as Ewan and Ma Cleghorn. Rather than uncritically include him in a group of cultural nationalists, we may therefore want to examine Gibbon's use of Scots and English in the light of Bourdieu's theory, which offers an alternative interpretation, namely an idea of the linguistic market as a national system structured around a centre-periphery dichotomy. Within this framework, the national perspective comes to represent the experience of provincials within a centralised state, which demands from those aspiring to become members of the political, socio-cultural and intellectual elite that they unlearn their native dialects and acquire Standard English (or French). Gibbon is aware that the Scot loses something when moving to the centre, and such emotions inspire his celebration of 'The Land' in *Scottish Scene*. At the same time he knows that a nostalgic attachment to provincial culture and speech may prevent social change and seems happy enough to let go of his Scottishness. '*Then I'm all for the English*', Ma Cleghorn responds when hearing about Scottish nationalism in *Grey Granite*, and one senses that she may be speaking on behalf of her author.[32]

The linguistic positions of the community, institutions, and nation are characterised by language usage that enables the reader to place speakers within a specific social and regional context. In comparison, the fourth position of cosmopolitanism is perhaps best described as a form of speech freed from the mannerisms that connect the language user to a specific class, profession or place. In 'Literary Lights' Gibbon

refers to 'that language of Cosmopolis towards which the whole creation moves', and what he seems to suggest is that all linguistic varieties will blend into one perfect speech which is shared by all humankind and which abolishes social distinctions based on community, class and nation.[33] It is an idealised position that the author associates with a utopian future rather than an imperfect present, which explains why no character in *A Scots Quair* completely masters this speech. The one who comes closest is Ewan, who already as a boy in small-town Segget opts for a medium which Thomas Crawford describes as 'cool English'.[34] Ewan's linguistic choice distinguishes him from his mother Chris, who is emotionally attached to the vernacular, and who notices how Ewan avoids Scottish words as 'old, blunted tools'.[35] Ewan's attitude to language is presented in the following extract from *Cloud Howe*, which also highlights how his speech alienates him from his peers:

> You couldn't see sense in rubbish like swearing, any more than in speaking in Scotch, not English, as mother did sometimes, and so did Robert, and so did Else (but she couldn't help it). Scotch was rubbish, all ee's and wee's, you didn't even speak it in the school playground. And the other kids had mocked you at first, but they didn't long, with a bashing or so.[36]

The connection that Ewan establishes between swearing and the vernacular suggests that he is attempting to clear his speech of all colloquial or provincial terminology. This is why his fellow scholars and apprentices find him difficult to place within the social hierarchy and consequently challenge him to a fight. Ewan's preference for a Standard English unmarked by class or region is in line with an internationalist vision that underlines the relationship between the plight of the Duncairn 'keelies' and the workers of other times and places.[37] At the end of *Grey Granite* Ewan is about to leave Duncairn for London where he will become an organiser for the Communist Party and, undoubtedly, his clean English will be an advantage here. Yet he has not fully mastered Gibbon's 'language of Cosmopolis', as we see in 'Apatite' when Ellen catches him off-guard: 'he didn't heed it, smiling into the misery of her eyes, speaking Scotch who so seldom spoke it, that blunted and foolish and out-dated tool: *You needn't fash for me*'.[38] The episode supports the claim that a world language freed of social and linguistic distinctions belongs to a utopian future, and this is probably the main reason why the linguistic position of cosmopolitanism cannot be fully realised in the realist fiction of *A Scots Quair*.

In light of the previous analysis, one is tempted to conclude that the linguistic experiment undertaken in *A Scots Quair* has only little bearing upon the cultural and political nationalism associated with Scottish inter-war literature. Yet Gibbon's fiction has attracted a growing number of readers over the past eighty years who will happily place him within Hugh MacDiarmid's Renaissance. Such a reading might be explained by several broadly related tendencies in Scottish cultural and literary history. S*unset Song* appeared at a moment when a growing number of Scottish writers, such as MacDiarmid and William Soutar, played with the idea of writing in the vernacular. Arguably, Gibbon offered the most successful attempt at writing Modernist prose in Scots, which made it natural for MacDiarmid to recruit him to the cause. Furthermore, due to his early death in 1935, Gibbon had been silenced by the time of the linguistic row between Hugh MacDiarmid and Edwin Muir caused by Muir's publication of *Scott and Scotland* (1936), which meant that few questioned the legitimacy of Gibbon's inclusion in MacDiarmid's Renaissance group.[39] More recently, contributing to the canonisation of Gibbon as a 'Scottish' writer is the way that critics have placed his work within Scottish literary history. In *The History of Scottish Literature* (1987) Gibbon is examined in a chapter on 'Novelists of the Renaissance', while Ian Campbell dedicates a chapter in his Gibbon monograph to the theme of 'Scotland'.[40] A final testimony to the continuous appeal of Gibbon is the imitation of his prose style by later writers. What was achieved by James Kelman and Irvine Welsh in novels such as *How late it was, how late* (1994) and *Trainspotting* (1993) may at least in part have been inspired by *A Scots Quair*, contributing to the idea of a Scottish vernacular tradition relaunched by Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Sunset Song* in 1932.

CHAPTER THREE

The Shifting Identities of Mitchell and Gibbon

Carla Sassi

The critical fate of James Leslie Mitchell/Lewis Grassic Gibbon has been indelibly entwined with the controversial process of canon-formation of Scottish Literature in the twentieth century, especially in relation to the so-called 'Scottish Literary Renaissance', a term originally devised by Hugh MacDiarmid to define a vanguard of writers who embraced an inter/nationalist, anti-imperialist agenda while pursuing a modernisation of Scottish letters.[1] As with many radical visions, in the course of time and through uncritical representations, even the notion of a Literary Renaissance turned into a critical cage: if originally it had the merit of theorising and coalescing interest around a new and important cultural-political trend, it gradually contributed to the overshadowing of other, by no means less relevant, literary expressions, as well as to a limited and monochromatic investigation of its canonised writers.

Mitchell, canonised as Grassic Gibbon, his Scottish literary pseudonym, has for a long time been considered one of the most iconic representatives of the Renaissance, part of that male trinity, alongside MacDiarmid and Neil M. Gunn, who dominated, until recently, its critical accounts.[2] Yet a re-reading of Mitchell's work reveals today a complex project, still very much in development when the author died, that seems quite distinct from MacDiarmid's complex inter/nationalist vision, and even more so from Gunn's more conventional longing for a cohesive national tradition. One of Mitchell's central concerns lies with the notion of 'identity' in its widest sense. His is not so much a quest for a specific authentic identity – political, national, literary or even gender – but rather a dialectical quest between and across conventionally defined identities. This chapter reassesses Mitchell's complex staging and negotiation of multiple identities and subjective positionings, both in his writings and in his life as a bio-fictional strategy, as conducive to a radical questioning of identity and subjectivity.[3]

Nomadic patterns

In his short life, Mitchell moved across very different worlds and life-experiences: from his early life in a peasant community in northeast Scotland to the working-class protests in Aberdeen as a journalist; from the Middle East as a soldier serving the British Empire, to different locations in England as a Royal Air Force clerk; and, eventually, to his first self-elected home in Welwyn Garden City, in a comfortable middle-class environment, where he could at last devote himself to full time writing, thus fulfilling his younger self's dream. If Mitchell's choice of Welwyn Garden City as his creative and existential home – at a distance from his other home, with which he had a close and yet problematic relation – was indeed an elective one, it is also true that, like millions of other people in the early decades of the twentieth century, he had comparatively little opportunity to actively choose his line of life, which was largely determined by the impact of traumatic global events. Britain's imperial policies in the Middle East, along with the First World War and the Depression, made him a witness of mass death, suffering and uprooting and exposed him, both at home and abroad, to jarring socio-economic and cultural juxtapositions, while the ideological and cultural frameworks of his time barely afforded him the tools to make sense of such a radically new, dissonant global picture.

Mitchell's (self-)displacement, intimately connected to the array of epochal changes that mark modernity, deeply affected his perception of his native region and country as much as his worldview, engendering that permanent fissure in the surface of reality which is at the heart of his work, as in much Modernist experimentalism. Such fissure can be detected, for example, in Gibbon's masterpiece *A Scots Quair* (1932–34): both Chris's anachronistic aloofness from the historical communities she becomes part of, and Ewan's launching into socialist utopia at the end of the trilogy, into a space and time that remain beyond the narrative world and unconquered by it, epitomise the Modernist fracture between referent and reality – a philosophical uprootedness that determines, as much as it is determined by, physical displacement.

Nomadic patterns, across time and space, are indeed one of the most defining features of Mitchell's oeuvre, thematically as much as structurally. Nomad figures recur in his fiction and in his scholarly/para-fictional writings. Real explorers (from Hanno in his first published work – 1928 – to the protagonists of *Nine against the Unknown*, 1934) or fictional ones, like the time-travellers in *Three Go Back* (1932) and *Gay Hunter* (1934),

or the visionary Malcom Maudslay in the semi-autobiographical *The Thirteenth Disciple* (1931); nomads proper, such as the Golden Age hunters in *Gay Hunter* and *Three Go Back,* or the Mongol hordes in *Persian Dawns, Egyptian Nights* (1932); uprooted cosmopolitans, such as Andreas van Koupa in *Stained Radiance* (1930), a globe-trotter who speaks nine languages, 'a poet and tramp', or Cairo-based Anton Saloney, the main narrator in the *Polychromata* series (1929–30), a 'dragoman, guide, ex-colonel of horse in the army of Deniken, and one-time Professor of English Literature in the Gymnasium of Kazan'.[4] Furthermore, many of Mitchell's characters retain a nomad-like essence, and are presented as the heirs to and custodians of that mythical, simple and joyful Golden Age Mitchell idealised throughout his writing career. These characters hold a special prophetic significance in Mitchell's fiction, and are thus characterised by an anachronistic quality: by evoking the possibility of a radically different social and political order, located in a mythical past or in a utopian future, they resist assimilation in the time they live in. Their nomadism is then defined not so much in terms of belonging to a specific social set-up or to a state of cultural uprootedness, but in terms of a voluntary, self-aware choice of giving up territorial fixed-ness, be it in terms of place, language, culture or ideology. Chris Guthrie in *A Scots Quair* may provide an effective illustration of this. Her aloofness from and even contempt for her contemporaries, her continued critique of the horrors of settled civilisation, her pursuit of freedom from current ideologies and any external authority, her connectedness with the natural environment, with which she symbolically merges at the end of the trilogy, provides a mature and striking version of Mitchell's nomadological vision. Chris is, in fact, the last in a remarkable series of female characters who herald and exemplify the freedom and happiness of 'the Golden Age of the poets (and reality) from the Shetlands to Tierra del Fuego'.[5] These include the Diffusionist Domina in *The Thirteenth Disciple*; Bishop Nerses's rebel daughter Amima in *Persian Dawns, Egyptian Nights*; Thea, a Mearns-born girl in post-First World War London, in *Stained Radiance*; Gay, the 'happy hunter' of the future in the eponymous science-fiction novel; Clair Stranlay in *Three Go Back,* who, by travelling to the prehistoric past and rescuing a threatened tribe of Golden Age nomads, redeems humankind's future from the shackles of civilisation. All these characters share very similar physical and psychological traits, to the point that some of them seem at times more types than full-blooded characters. Very much like Chris, they are androgynously slim, 'dark and sinewy and agile', a physical token of their kinship with the Maglemosians –

'shy hunters, courageous, happy, kindly' – who inhabited Scotland before the introduction of agriculture.[6] Like Chris, they also deeply question civilisation with its encoding machineries of power, and, perhaps more significantly, they challenge patriarchy as its structuring principle.

Mitchell's nomadology is largely the outcome of his idiosyncratic reappropriation of Diffusionism, in particular of the theories promoted by British-based theorists such as G. Elliot Smith and W. J. Perry, who believed that civilisation had first developed in ancient Egypt and had emanated from a superior race, the 'European' Cro-Magnon, before diffusing throughout the world.[7] Given both the idiosyncratic nature of Mitchell's adaptation of Diffusionist theories and the contested status of Diffusionism itself within the anthropologists' own ranks, it comes as little surprise that their deployment by Mitchell has been the source of much discontent, not to say embarrassment, especially among his early critics.[8] Diffusionism was in fact critiqued in terms of its scientific credibility in its heyday, in the early decades of the twentieth century, while in more recent times it has been rightly charged with fostering the myth of the superiority and centrality of the European civilisation and race.[9] And yet, Mitchell's Diffusionist-inspired imagination, hovering between a Rousseauesque ideal of a humanity uncorrupted by civilisation and the utopia of an equalitarian society, free from the hierarchical assumptions and class segregations brought about by sedentary life, stands as a largely autonomous, complex project. Mitchell seems in fact distant from notions of European superiority, and certainly not bent on celebrating European imperialism or, indeed, any form of social/political control. On the contrary, his free, roaming hunters stand for a systematic resistance against assimilation to any dominant structures, thus celebrating an ontology of movement and freedom.

Arguably, Diffusionism functioned as a lens through which Mitchell could join together different layers of experiences, interests and ideologies into an integrated vision: his direct experience of the unrelenting harshness of farming life and his peasant's atavistic distrust for urban/industrial civilisation, combined with his anarcho-socialist aspiration for a just, equalitarian society; a para-imperial delight in exploration and geographical discovery, at times developed into racialised or essentialist categorisations; an attempt at framing a modern and *glocal* redefinition of Scottishness, resonating with similar attempts by other writers of the Scottish Renaissance,[10] blended with a militant awareness that the progressive and state-centred narrative of early twentieth-century historiography was leaving both a stateless nation like Scotland, or social

classes such as the peasantry and the working classes, completely written out of history. More importantly, Diffusionism allowed him to place the horrors his generation suffered and witnessed in a redemptive framework – to see a way out of them, so to speak, if only beyond history. As Douglas Young states, 'although Diffusionism is a theory of man's past history, Mitchell made it the basis of a constructive vision of the future'.[11] Mitchell's encounter with Diffusionism had the contours of a *coup de foudre* – an emotional recognition and not just a purely intellectual project. As pointed out by Young, the first scholar to perceive its centrality in the author's thinking, 'when he came across the Diffusionist theory he found that it coincided so exactly with his own early experience that he adopted it with complete enthusiasm, making it the basis of his whole philosophy'.[12]

Notwithstanding Mitchell's earnest scholarly engagement with Diffusionist theories, leading to Elliot Smith's enthusiastic heralding of *The Conquest of the Maya* (1934) as 'a definite contribution to the great task of anthropology', his engagement with them is in fact best evaluated as a complex creative project in its own right.[13] What Mitchell makes of Diffusionism should be interrogated as a powerful, if only, at times, enervatingly naive mythical vision, which provided, very much like classical myth for T. S. Eliot or James Joyce, a lens through which one could make sense of the world – a universal key to the codes of human history that could bestow a sense of order and finality to the painfully meaningless fragmentariness of modernity. It should also be seen as an attempt to redeem the individual's freedom and agency in a historical period when, as Sigmund Freud and Elias Canetti, among others, highlighted, it seemed that crowds or masses were swallowing the individual's rationality and humanity, generating the horrors of war and dictatorship. Finally, Mitchell's nomadological vision foregrounded a de-territorialised mode of belonging and an uneasy relation to the notion of home and to fixedness in relation to place-bound identities. It can be argued that Mitchell implicitly questioned and undermined the contemporary conventional discourse of national identity, foregrounding a dynamic and fluid idea of Scottishness, as exemplified by Chris Guthrie ('Chris Caledonia'), whose complex and prismatic identity is presented as a process that Chris records through time on her mirrored image, dominated by change, loss and transformation.

Nomadic patterns in Mitchell's work, then, represent an important reflection on conflicting notions of identity – collective versus individual, local/national versus cosmopolitan. By questioning contemporary

parameters, they provide a topical response to the dramatic challenges brought about by early modernity.

The heterodox imperative

Mitchell is a difficult, enigmatic writer. Even beneath the deceptively mimetic surface of his most famous work – *A Scots Quair*, authored by 'Gibbon' – there lies a complexity that defies easy comparisons with other contemporary writers. In ideological terms, for example, he is arguably more difficult to pigeonhole than MacDiarmid: Mitchell openly proclaimed his socialist or anarcho-communist leanings, yet, these seem much less defined and rooted in practice than the political nationalist-communist affiliations of his colleague. Similarly, his literary output is not only uneven in aesthetic terms, but is characterised by a disorientating, kaleidoscopic experimentation in literary styles and genres. It is tempting to ascribe such enigmatic difficulty and unevenness entirely to the brevity of Mitchell's life and stunningly concentrated writing career – he published seventeen books in five years, as if presaging his untimely death – or to the fact that his death came at a time when he was still honing his own vision and style. However, the reasons behind the difficulty of Mitchell's work seem to be more complex than mere accident, and instead represent a structurally central aspect of his art and philosophy.

The notion of a 'heterodox imperative' introduced in this section is an attempt at re-conceptualising one of the most elusive aspects of Mitchell's writerly identity: a systematic refusal to abide by any orthodox standard and a distrust of authority which often reverberate into a complex, self-ironic game of self-distancing from one's own position. This is an ideological and conscious as much as an idiosyncratic and intuitive attitude – an 'imperative', insofar as it is deeply inscribed in Mitchell's personal history and approach to writing. Mitchell's heterodoxical stance is indeed difficult to define, as it does not simply involve an (un)acceptable deviation from a specific doctrine or practice (such as capitalism, mass society, war), but a difference from *any* doxic position. Its main aim is arguably that of driving a wedge in the very notion of orthodoxy, fissuring it. It stands for a permanent critical distance, a militant scepticism in relation to all collective practices and beliefs; a deep-seated need to defy authority figures and restrictions. In this respect, Mitchell's heterodoxical stance may indeed be seen as linked to his nomadic vision – a vision of freedom from territorial boundaries, hierarchies and fixed ideologies – and to his anarcho-communist ideals in an ideological continuum.

This aspect of Mitchell's work and philosophy has been overlooked or sidelined by most critics, who have instead focused on the more orthodox and traceable aspects of his work, such as a sense of place and community or a radical gender politics. A few scholars have perceived its distinctive value and centrality, from Jeremy Idle, who recorded Mitchell's fiercely overstated individualism and 'ferocity of opinions', to William K. Malcolm, who traced a 'sardonic principle' underlying his work, foregrounding a de-familiarising fracture between his political vision and his aesthetical expression.[14] Malcolm is, in fact, possibly the first scholar to identify in such a trait Mitchell's 'true literary voice' and defining centrality in his work.[15]

One wonders if Mitchell, had he lived longer, would have eventually provided a fully fledged theorisation of heterodoxy as a method. What we know, however, is that he did show, both in his fictional and non-fictional work, a certain degree of theoretical awareness in this respect. Heretical, a recurring key word, often marking a positive attribute of Mitchell's characters and narrators, provides us with a useful starting point for our discussion. In Mitchell's fiction the word heretical is at times used as a historical reference (for example, Nestorianism in *Persian Dawns*), but it more often takes on a non-religious significance, conveying a secular attitude or secular interests.[16] Indeed Diffusionism is described in one of Mitchell's scholarly articles as a secular 'heresy', a cross-reference that testifies to the connectedness of the nomadic vision with the heterodox imperative, as well as to the fictional and autobiographical interplay in his work, which will be investigated in the last section of the chapter.[17]

Secular heretics and heresies appear especially relevant in the *Polychromata* series. For example, Thibaut Gellion, a French astronomer and a friend of Anton Saloney, the cosmopolitan narrator, is described as a

> born heretic, the champion of the lost cause and the wild surmise. Yet of the strict and impartial. His enthusiasm for his heresy of the moment was but equalled by his severity in the sifting of evidence that appeared to support that heresy. As a result, he never substantiated the single belief of importance, nor had ever the illusion of so doing – until the year before his death.[18]

There is admiration and empathy seeping through Saloney's strangely foreign English, as well as through Mitchell's own construction of one of his many fictional alter-egos. The term 'heresy' here expands semantically

to define a self-abnegating quest for knowledge, almost an end in itself; it hovers between a religious and a scientific pursuit, and is marked by a stubborn, almost narcissistic aloofness from anything and anyone. It is also presented as an imperative, a compulsion, insofar as Gellion is a 'born heretic'. The perceivable kinship linking the character to the narrator and to the (implied) author – all 'heretical' by mission and vocation – provides an illustration of the complex autobiographical continuum that informs Mitchell's writings, and will be discussed in the last section of this chapter. The strange brand of heresy to which Gellion conforms is traceable in a host of minor characters in Mitchell's fiction, and finds in Chris Guthrie its possibly most mature expression. Chris's aloofness, her frequent withdrawing to the standing stones on the top of a hill, which represents both a physical and temporal distancing from the myths and beliefs of her time; her rejection of all ideologies, those 'clouds that swept through the Howe of the world, with men that took them for gods', including those that kindle her son's heart, are possibly the most convincing articulation and explanation of Mitchell's heterodoxical method.[19] It is through Chris's systematic and anachronistic distancing from them that she is shown to achieve that clarity of vision that distinguishes her from most characters in *A Scots Quair*: an ability to see through and critique social and political ideas and practices. Furthermore, unlike Gellion and other narcissistic heretics, Chris is able to solicit sympathy from readers. The 'conversational intimacy' that characterises *A Scots Quair*, and *Sunset Song* in particular, and that is built on the reader's perceived closeness to Chris's thoughts and feelings, is part of her special appeal and makes her a more persuasive vehicle of the goodness of an heterodoxical stance.[20]

The heterodox imperative informs Mitchell's narratives also at a deeper, structural level. His experimental use of language throughout his writing career provides a meaningful example of this. As John Corbett points out, *Sunset Song* draws 'on the linguistic resources English shares with Scots, and fashion[s] a rhythmic quality that could be identified as Scottish', or rather as 'rhythmically "un-English"'.[21] One might contend, in fact, that in its self-conscious hybridity (discussed in 'Literary Lights'), this is a language that is 'un-Scottish' in its grammar and a great part of its lexicon as much as it is 'un-English' in its rhythm. *Sunset Song* therefore stages the same heretical distance from Braid Scots and from Standard English, eventually undermining the desirability of *any* linguistic orthodoxy. Corbett also draws a comparison between the un-Englishness of the language of *A Scots Quair* and the 'foreignness' of the prose of *Spartacus* (1933), a novel which is hard to classify both in terms of its

lexicon, characterised by several Greek and Latin borrowings, and, more significantly, in terms of its Latinate syntactical features.[22] Corbett concludes that the '"stilted", "un-English" grammar of *Spartacus* […] results in a prose style that is distinct from that of *Sunset Song*' as 'the reader is set at much more of a distance from the actors in the drama, who play out their roles often at the mercy of externalised, brutalising emotions'.[23] Irrespective of their different structures and of their varying aesthetic quality, it seems, however, that both texts articulate the same heretical distance towards standard languages, a distance that characterises, in different measure, all of Mitchell's prose – the strange, raw 'Modernist' language of *Stained Radiance* and Anton Saloney's Russian-inflected English in the *Polychromata* series may provide two further enlightening illustrations of this.

An even subtler and certainly more disorienting manifestation of Mitchell's heterodoxical method is traceable in the (self-)ironic mode that haunts and disrupts his narratives. Irony is a powerful distancing tool, as is evident in his first published novel, *Stained Radiance*. This is a novel that most critics would understandably regard as aesthetically unworthy,[24] but nonetheless it can be seen as a workshop of themes and narrative strategies that Mitchell would develop and mature in subsequent works, as its subtitle, *A Fictionist's Prelude*, foregrounds. As Anthony Shuttleworth observes,

> [T]he reader is constantly alerted to the narrative's ironic mode, Garland always adopting a detached, sardonic view of the social milieux – mostly the middle-class Left – in which he moves. The overall effect is of an inconsistency in narrative position, a sense that the text is by turns assuming and experimenting with different moral, political and even metaphysical standpoints.[25]

While aesthetic limitations are evident, it is also clear that the author is here testing and honing his literary method. The metafictional and autobiographical elements are indeed both apparent in the title of John Garland's first literary effort, the 'First Novel of an Ironist',[26] and in the 'detached, sardonic view' pointed to by Shuttleworth. The complexity of Mitchell's method is fully disclosed in the narrator's description of Garland's experience as a writer:

> His characters, intended to collide and produce ironic mirth from their abrasion-rubbings and ingenious theorisings on the subjects of collisions,

> were becoming unmanageable. Frequently they completely escaped him, disappearing into jungle undergrowths of his mind; sometimes they shammed dead; occasionally they broke loose and played the devil till the whole story-structure tottered rottenly.[27]

The conscious, (self-)ironic game is here taken to its extreme, simultaneously revealing and undermining the relationship between the fictional author and his characters, between the narrator and the novel's characters and, by metonymy, between Mitchell and his literary creations, fragmenting the narrative into self-ironising, semi-autobiographical projections of the author.

Multi-identity as performance

Mitchell stepped openly into the national debate on the state of Scottish culture and letters as one of the foremost militant voices, and yet, at the same time, he was engaging with and writing on a remarkable number of different topics and from a kaleidoscopic number of different perspectives. The heterogeneity of his production is stunning and in itself problematic, and calls for probing and understanding. From 'Orientalist' short stories to historical novels, science fiction to fictions of adventure and exploration, scholarly studies of ancient civilisations and religions and accounts of geographical exploration, to allegorical narratives of Scottish rural and industrial life: in his short life Mitchell avidly donned many literary robes, well beyond the self-theorised divide between James Leslie Mitchell, the writer based in Welwyn Garden City and 'distant cousin' of the Scottish novelist Lewis Grassic Gibbon, and while doing so, he often (un)wittingly blurred the boundaries separating his 'real' self from the authorial personae and the many semi-autobiographical characters in his writings.[28] The outcome is a fascinatingly kaleidoscopic theatre of the author's self.[29]

That Mitchell's writing is 'strongly autobiographical' has been pointed out by critics before, first among them his biographer, Ian S. Munro.[30] The autobiographical continuum that underlies his works, however, is particularly complex and, as stated previously, it has a thematic as well as a structural value. Several characters and events in Mitchell's fictional work embody and dramatise his life's experiences and ideas, something that, after all, applies in different measure to all writers, insofar as discoursal repertoires – Bakhtin's 'voices' – are inevitably rooted in

their own experience. However, Mitchell at times strategically blurs the conventional boundaries between the text's internal and external allusions and references, in what can be aptly described as a wider, often self-ironic, bio-fictional project. In his non-fictional work, for example, an authorial persona, sharing common traits with some of his literary creations, such as the above-mentioned Garland, Maudslay, Saloney or Chris, is always easily identifiable. This is especially evident in the *Scottish Scene* essays, which stage 'Lewis Grassic Gibbon' as a character in its own right – his fiercely ironic distance from the different topics, and vitriolic and hyperbolic comments, force the reader to focus on his voice at least as much as on his arguments and thoughts. Furthermore, by ironically evoking 'Mitchell' as an external/internal co-authority – 'my distant cousin, Mr Leslie Mitchell' – he creates an interesting intertextual play that enhances the perception of a complex author-character, discoursally constructed across different texts, and thus multiple, at times even contradictory.[31] The very reference to 'Mitchell' in a text by 'Gibbon' represents an ironic distancing from the well-known fiction of two distinct and independent writers. Similar self-reflexive features are evident, even though to a lesser degree, in most of his scholarly works. *Nine Against the Unknown* is the only work co-authored by both Mitchell and Gibbon – another example of ironic undermining of the two distinct writers' fiction. In this work, for example, the authorial voice is on the whole more balanced and discreet, but still judgemental and idiosyncratic; we learn, among other things, that Richard Burton as a child was 'small, dark, black-eyed, insolent of bearing' and endowed with 'a ruffian chin and godlike brow'.[32] The authorial voice, furthermore, presides over the complex task of tracing a path between the competing ideologies and life stories of the nine explorers, a path that largely coincides with that traced by Mitchell himself across his writings. For example, Mitchell's Diffusionist creed informs the introduction to the volume, where he briefly traces the history of exploration as a shift from the 'irrational' quest for 'amulets against death and misfortune' of early man, 'a happy and kindly animal', to the 'rational', greedy desire to conquer riches and lands that is brought by the advent of agriculture and civilisation.[33] It is in light of this ideology that the explorers' individual quests, carried out 'in different names and guises', are revisited and seen as all striving to attain 'the unattainable same', a longed for *other* place, 'the happy Fortunate Isles', belief in which is marked by the 'glamour gloriously inescapable' of the early man's irrational and 'innocent' quest.[34] The nine biographical portraits that follow are indeed

constructed homogeneously along these ideological lines and function as a trans-geographical and trans-temporal projection of the authorial voice and the (real) author's self.

The intertextual game of personae creating personae becomes even more complex in Mitchell's fictional work. In *The Thirteenth Disciple* the narrator's voice becomes abruptly self-reflexive in the short 'Interpolation', which marks a shift from Malcom's meditation on identity, sexuality and his quest for a new mode of literary representation, to the narrator's ironic de-authorisation of Malcom's thoughts and, ultimately, of his own work.[35] Malcom, himself an autobiographical projection of Mitchell, has a sudden vision of the novel he would write: 'What a book, *what* a book one could make of it […] – the sex act – stripped of shame and reticence! With neither the wordy pawings of the pornographer, the scared brutalities of the realist, the romantic's firelight and curtains –'.[36] His vision is, however, brusquely cut short by the narrator, also a projection of Mitchell, who admits that, while 'transcribing that novel of Malcom's', he has realised he, as a narrator, is 'neither the realist nor the romantic', but 'the pornographer', relying on 'chapter endings and hesitation dots' and hiding 'behind shields of phrase and phantasy'; a pornographer *malgré lui*, we may add, who turns the sex act into pornography by deploying a voyeuristic, repressed mode of representation, since to writers 'of the early half of the twentieth century the detailed sex-act is still impossible in all literature but the pseudo-scientific'.[37] The metafictional game, arguably at times aesthetically quite raw and unpolished in this novel, develops further by questioning the boundaries separating Mitchell and his three alter-egos, the narrator, Malcom and Domina. For example, Domina's story interferes with Malcom's attempted narration of his life – so much so, he has to remind himself, 'this is *my* autobiography, not Domina's' – while a similar overlapping takes place between Domina and the narrator, who, as it were, collaborate in the production of Malcom's biography: 'and Domina has told me of a swift and vivid and foolish thought she had at the moment, looking at him – that he was neither Metaxa, nor Malcom, but Man himself …'[38] Perhaps more importantly, as it seems to consciously prefigure Mitchell's own intertextual bio-fictional project, is Malcom's plan to write 'his immense *Autobiography*'.[39]

This same deployment of ironic, meta-autobiographical strategies is detectable in other works, more notably in Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*, where a shifting narrating voice, often ironic or self-ironic, seems to bring to maturity Mitchell's previous experimentations. The narrator's intriguing use of the pronoun 'you', that shifts from a generic impersonal use (to

convey objective information) to a self-referring one (inviting identification from the reader), as pointed out in Graham Trengove's seminal study,[40] creates a seductive sense of intimacy whereby the reader experiences a sense of closeness to the characters' thoughts and actions, of 'eavesdropping', as Corbett aptly observes.[41] The shifting 'you', in fact, also signals the presence of a protean, unpredictable 'I', that at times distances him or herself from the reader, and at other times seduces the reader into the illusion of being an active part of the fictional world. This is a narrator who dons several identities in the course of the three novels: from chronicler to story-teller; from mean and envious to humane and empathetic; from conservative to radical; from peasant to working-class; from feminine to masculine; from rooted in the here-and-now of the story and with a limited spatio-temporal perspective to detached and speaking from an external, privileged perspective; from distinct and autonomous, almost a character in his own right, to overlapping with some of the characters' voices. The kaleidoscopic diversity of roles staged creates a subtle impression of a *performing*, rather than a simply telling/writing narrator, and it gestures towards a Modernist model of selfhood, affected by change and fragmentation and redeemable only through performance.[42]

Autobiographical references and references to real characters and places in *A Scots Quair* have been amply investigated by scholars and reviewers.[43] It is in fact the realness of such references that have, in the course of time, persuaded most critics and readers not only that 'Gibbon' represents Mitchell's most authentic voice, but that such a voice can be traced as a consistent one. What the present chapter contends, instead, is that 'Gibbon' may indeed be considered as the fictional author of Mitchell's most successful and enduring works, but that the very notion of an authentic or essential 'Gibbon' goes against the very grain of Mitchell's project. The incongruous inscription of the Reverend Gibbon in *Sunset Song*, presented as a comic opportunist, a hedonist and a womaniser, but also as a captivating speaker and storyteller, able to mesmerise his audience, seems indeed to prove this point. What would such a clownish figure, bearing the fictional author's name, represent other than an ultimate ironic undermining of 'Gibbon' as a monolithic, consistent, reliable author, and his re-inscription as a shifting, self-ironic, singular plurality?

The themes of trauma, war, social conflict, fragmented identity and the search for self all come together in Mitchell's novels. The originality of his contribution lies, at a formal level, in his restless experimentation with style, language and voice, and, at a conceptual and philosophical

level, in his expression of cultural ambivalence, in his fragmented but simultaneous inscription between Scotland and the whole world, rooted in the local and yet embracing the global. Mitchell's work provides a conscious reflection on the author's sense of duality, a simultaneous sense of belonging and displacement, and conveys this through the ambiguity of his discursive position and through a textual pattern of radical subversions. Mitchell created a dislocated discursive system, whose inherent tensions and ambivalences subverted contemporary notions of nation and patriarchy by articulating a fascinating negotiation of the indices and register of identity.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Scots Quair and History

Timothy C. Baker

Late in *Grey Granite* (1934), one of the Gowans strikers tells Ewan Tavendale that it is a '*hell of a thing to be History*'; as Ewan clarifies, this raises the possibility of being 'not a student, a historian, a tinkling reformer, but LIVING HISTORY ONESELF, being it, making it, eyes for the eyeless, hands for the maimed!'[1] Although critics have alternately argued that the historical elements in *A Scots Quair* simply establish 'a setting for a struggle in the here and now' or present 'a straightforward Diffusionist account of history' that the reader is meant to accept as 'authoritative', Gibbon's approach to history is often far more nuanced.[2] *A Scots Quair* (1932–34), the trilogy of novels which concludes with *Grey Granite*, can be read not simply as an account of both recent and ancient history but as, in Ewan's words, living history itself: Gibbon not only highlights the relation of individuals and communities to various aspects of the past, but structures the trilogy in such a way that past and present are continually intermingled in order to present a view of history as lived experience. Gibbon focuses on the interrelation between history as record or text, as communal memory, and as individual experience in order continually to complicate the relation between multiple times and perspectives. In its focus on the tensions between history and experience, the *Quair* can be seen in relation to both Modernist and modern Scottish Renaissance ideas of history; its combination of a distrust of the artistic representation of history with a reliance on the same, however, remains almost unique.

The prelude to *Sunset Song* (1932) suggests the complexity of Gibbon's view of history. 'The Unfurrowed Field' opens with heightened diction, combining history and myth and depicting a Scotland where gryphons roam the countryside and children have their throats torn out by wolves. Familiar place-names and historical figures such as James Boswell are juxtaposed with more traditionally romantic elements. This blend of

myth and history is soon dispatched, however, and only a few pages later the prelude begins again in a slightly different voice: 'So by the winter of nineteen eleven there were no more than nine bit places left the Kinraddie estate'.[3] The mythic sweep of the initial section is replaced with a more focused presentation of the region and its people, just as the language transmutes from a pseudo-medieval tone to the more colloquial Scots-inflected second-person voice that Gibbon uses throughout the remainder of the novel. Myth and history remain inseparable from daily life, however; the sounds of birds and the memory of druid rituals equally inform the present. Blawearie, which will become the Guthries' steading, is itself presented as 'Out of the World': although it is given a precise geographical location and a clear physical description, it is also described in relation to both local gossip and pre-historic tradition.[4] The communal memories attached to a place shape it.

After detailing the various steadings of Kinraddie, the prelude ends with an oft-noted reference to literary tradition:

> So that was Kinraddie that bleak winter of nineteen eleven and the new minister, him they chose early next year, he was to say it was the Scots countryside itself, fathered between a kailyard and a bonny brier bush in the lee of a house with green shutters. And what he meant by that you could guess at yourself if you'd a mind for puzzles and dirt, there wasn't a house with green shutters in the whole of Kinraddie.[5]

The references here are to Ian Maclaren's *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush* (1894) and George Douglas Brown's *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901), often held as opposed representations of Scottish rural life. While most critics have interpreted this passage as a statement of Gibbon's intent to combine the kailyard sentiment of Maclaren with the more brutal naturalism of Douglas Brown, Gibbon also suggests the insufficiency of such an approach. Literary comparisons, as presented here by the unpopular Reverend Gibbon, are imposed from outside, and are always partial. The prelude thus introduces three possible approaches to a depiction of Scotland, whether through historical myth, communal memory and folklore, or literary sources, and suggests that none of them are independently sufficient to understand a place like Kinraddie. The prelude provides the language of the student, the historian, and perhaps the reformer, but none of these fully permit an understanding of what it might be to be living history.

Gibbon's multiple approaches to historical memory in the prelude constitute the 'thorough revaluation of our literary past' that Hugh MacDiarmid, in a book co-authored with Gibbon, argues is the primary task of the modern Scottish Renaissance.[6] Indeed, in the same essay MacDiarmid goes so far as to argue that his contemporaries 'are more concerned with the breakdown of old traditions than with the consolidation of the new'.[7] Such revaluation, according to MacDiarmid, is necessary before the Scottish novel can fully evolve to reflect a new form of national identity. This work will gradually allow contemporary writers, including Gibbon, to embark on an 'extensive exploration and adequate description of Scotland [… that] will constitute the most important elements of the great bulk of Scottish literature in the immediate future'.[8] The discussion and interpretation of tradition thus makes room for a new, vibrant form of national literature. Yet in his own survey of contemporary writers in the same volume, Gibbon argues that even such a historical revaluation is not taking place in the literature of his time; Scottish writers are hampered by their consciousness of their 'inferiority of cultural position with the English tradition'.[9] Even the best Scottish writers, by writing in English, can be seen only in light of a larger English tradition in which they play a peripheral role. The prelude to *Sunset Song*, then, can be seen as an attempt to reconcile these two positions. On the one hand, by equating the local and the national, the personal and the collective, and the political and mythic, it manages to suggest a nascent revaluation of history, shifting the emphasis from traditional accounts to more immediate, if potentially anonymous, lived experience. Likewise, by foregrounding different registers and vocabularies, Gibbon immediately separates himself from a mainstream English tradition. The prelude, then, situates Gibbon's work at the forefront of larger Scots Renaissance concerns.

As suggested above, however, the prelude also works against the very approaches it suggests. Slightly afterwards, in a scene focused on Chris Guthrie's schooling, Gibbon suggests a new approach to history:

> But everybody knew that the English were awful mean and couldn't speak right and were cowards who captured Wallace and killed him by treachery. But they'd been beaten right well at Bannockburn, then, Edward the Second hadn't drawn rein till he was in Dunbar, and ever after that the English were beaten in all the wars, except Flodden and they won at Flodden by treachery again, just as it told in *The Flowers of the Forest*. Always she wanted to cry when she heard that played and a lot of folk

> singing it at a parish concert in Echt, for the sadness of it and the lads that came back never again to their lasses among the stooks, and the lasses that never married but sat and stared down south to the English border where their lads lay happed in blood and earth, with their bloodied kilts and broken helmets.[10]

In three sentences, Chris moves from a caricatured view of history and politics to a celebration of collective memory and identity, connected by a work of art. The song allows Chris to move from an understanding of history as determined by national identity and battles to one based around nameless individuals and grounded in emotion. Far from Stephen Dedalus's 'nightmare' in Joyce's *Ulysses*, for Chris, history, when mediated through art, is a foundation for communal belonging. Even the lengthening sentences indicate the way art transfigures her understanding, as she develops a heightened empathy. Later in *Sunset Song*, Chris sings 'Flowers of the Forest' to Ewan at their wedding: the song here both has an individual significance and foreshadows Ewan's eventual death. At the novel's end it is played again by the Highlandman McIvor to the people of Kinraddie as they mourn their war dead; while the music itself is printed in the novel, 'the young ploughmen they stood with glum, white faces, they'd no understanding or caring, it was something that vexed and tore at them, it belonged to times they had no knowing of'.[11] The song, made extraordinary and almost tangible by its printed image, both carries real emotional resonance and is removed from the present: it is the only way to express the communal grief, yet cannot be translated into historical understanding. As Robert Crawford, among others, has suggested, 'Flowers of the Forest' is the 'sunset song' of the title, and is used to chronicle 'the passing of a way of life'.[12] At the same time, however, the repetition of the song in multiple environments suggests that the work of art becomes a way for individuals to understand themselves in relation to a larger notion of history, even when the particular significance of the work is forgotten.

The role of 'Flowers of the Forest' in the novel is developed in two encounters with places of historic significance. At Dunnottar Castle, Ewan and Chris read a monument to the prisoners who died there in 1685, including those whose names 'WEE : KNOW : NOT', as well as named individuals, and quickly escape to look at the sea.[13] At the end of the novel a similar monument is unveiled, memorialising the men, including Ewan, 'WHO : WERE : OF : THIS : LAND : AND : FELL : IN : THE : GREAT : WAR'.[14] The common lettering, offset from the body of

the text, suggests that those names engraved on the recent monument will be as forgotten as those of the earlier figures, and as easy to overlook. As Chris reflects later, such monuments are meant to commemorate '[f]olk of her own, those folk who had died, out in the dark, strange places of earth' and yet, in Robert Colquohoun's words, are ultimately no more than '*trumpery flummery*'.[15] The inscriptions on the monument constitute an unchanging text that inevitably misrepresents the events they commemorate. As Jan Assmann argues, texts constitute a form of 'cultural memory' that is opposed to the collective, bonding memory of oral tradition. As he writes, tradition can be seen as the antithesis of both lived or embodied memory and of the fixed status of writing: 'living, embodied memory and communication find their death in tradition, and living, embodied tradition finds its death in the normative written word'.[16] This dual sense of tradition is precisely Gibbon's concern. The monuments to the dead fix tradition in such a way that it ceases to be meaningful. At the same time, however, that tradition is already suspect, as it can only emerge from the death of the living, embodied history or memory that Ewan advocates in *Grey Granite*.

This second death is seen when Chris and Ewan visit Edzell Castle, not long after their marriage. Rather than an engraved monument, they find 'crumbling' pictures representing the stories told at the opening of the prelude. Although Chris dismisses the stories, she nevertheless feels 'fey' and reflects on those who 'had no name or remembered place, even in the lands of death they were maybe forgotten, for maybe the dead died once again, and again went on'.[17] If the monument inscriptions can be seen as a form of cultural memory, the paintings might be seen as a form of collective memory, reifying a still earlier form of memory even as they allow a dim form of access to the past. Indeed, as Nancy Armstrong argues, uncanny experiences, such as Chris has here, are 'fundamentally collective, involving not only a loss of the difference between inside and outside but a loss of the difference between individual and aggregate as well'.[18] In these encounters with art, Chris loses herself in a larger communion with the dead. Yet the dead remain unknowable, and the effects of the work of art are not lasting. Like 'Flowers of the Forest', these works of art can gesture to earlier times and people, but ultimately reinforce the absence of any certain knowledge. At this moment, Chris recognises the incompatibility of her appeal to history and her philosophy of change, as will be presented more clearly in *Grey Granite*. Her study of history, previously framed as the work of the 'English Chris', has placed her outside the world, and yet also guarantees a deeper understanding than her husband Ewan,

for instance, can possess. As such, she can be seen in light of G. Gregory Smith's influential framing of the Caledonian antisyzgy, poised between 'real life and romance, everyday fact and the supernatural'.[19] Although Robert Colquohoun's exclamation '*Oh Chris Caledonia, I've married a nation*' has often been overemphasised in nationalist readings of the text, allowing Chris to become a symbol of Scotland, in her understanding of history she does represent the 'perpetual opposition' posited by Sydney Goodsir Smith and MacDiarmid as central to the Scottish psyche.[20]

Unlike Chris's important predecessor and possible model Martha Ironside in Nan Shepherd's *The Quarry Wood* (1928), Chris is unable fully to synthesise her reading and experience. For Martha, texts and the natural world equally contribute to an understanding of self:

> She was reading history that year. The slow accumulation of facts and dates was marshalled in her brain, waiting for the fire from heaven to fall; and as she turned from reading and gazed on that wide country gathering blue airs about itself; saw the farms and cottar houses, roads, dykes, fields, river, she was teased from her own inner stillness by an excitement to which all she had been reading anent the press and stir of centuries contributed. Looking up, she thought suddenly, 'I am a portion of history'.[21]

Chris, conversely, sees herself as fundamentally outside history and ideology, arguing that patriotism, love, Christianity, socialism and nationalism are simply clouds that 'passed and finished, dissolved and were done'.[22] An understanding of history works as a force of both separation and aggregation, just as the material artefacts she sees in Edzell suggest another world in their very process of deterioration. Throughout *Sunset Song*, then, Gibbon continually complicates the relation between the work of art and the representation of history. Songs and paintings allow for an expression of communal identity, but can only provide fleeting access to the past, while the written word appears to offer more direct access, by highlighting individual names and deeds, at the expense of empathy or understanding.

The structure of the novel itself, however, suggests another way in which art can represent historical moments. Each chapter begins with a brief prolepsis, most often depicting Chris reflecting on immediately previous events. At the close of *Sunset Song*, for instance, Chris Tavendale stands listening to the piper, while Robert Colquohoun waits behind her. After a brief proem, structurally similar to the prelude in *Sunset Song*, *Cloud Howe* (1933) opens with Chris Colquohoun walking away from

the Manse the day after she has moved to Segget. Although the specifics of her marriage and move will be revealed in the subsequent pages, Chris is here abruptly presented as a new person. By avoiding a straightforward chronological narration, Gibbon highlights the extent to which the entire novel, even as it edges into the present, is already historical; even more importantly, he aligns the reader with Chris in a quest to understand how both individual and collective pasts can shape the individual in the present. In this light, Chris's engagement with history is more complex than either Robert's or her son Ewan's. As a young man, Ewan echoes Chris's own earlier interest in learning history through books; although most of his reading is 'dull as ditchwater', books give him a sense of how people lived, and even suggest the possible 'lives of the people ere history began'.[23] In a sermon early in *Cloud Howe*, meanwhile, Robert repeats the story of the ruined Kaimes previously presented in the proem in order to argue that all 'history had been no more than the gabble of a horde of apes that was trapped in a pit'.[24] Like Chris in *Sunset Song*, Robert looks to the historical material previously presented in order to deny it. Yet because that material has been offered as an introduction to the volume, in an apparently authoritative voice, the reader is unable to repudiate it so unequivocally. The reader is thus torn between taking the prefatory material as explanation, as Ewan would, or as distraction, as Robert would. In both each chapter and the novel as a whole, Chris and the reader are torn between recognising that the present is predicated on historical narrative, and that such a narrative will always be partial and potentially misleading.

One possible solution to this apparent impasse is Gibbon's focus on the land. As Robert comments shortly before they come across the monument:

> *It's like walking a town of the dead, forgotten, a ruined place in the light of the moon. Can you think that folk'll do that sometime, far off some night in the times to be, maybe a lad and his lass, as we are, and wonder about Segget and the things they did and said and believed in those little houses? And the moon the same and the hills to watch.*[25]

The permanence of the land itself renders the lives of its individual inhabitants at any given time less meaningful in themselves, but also suggests a continuity that stretches beyond any individual consciousness. Chris later frames the opposition between the lives of humans and the 'unstirred and untouched' land in terms of 'the REAL': if all human life

can be seen as continuous change, the land serves as an unchanging foundation for experience.[26] The novel's overarching theme of the move from agricultural lifestyles to urban development suggests, according to Raymond Williams, two views of history in the novel. Firstly, it presents industrialisation and rural loss as 'an actual phase of our history', specific to a particular time and place.[27] Yet the relation between the land and people is also, as Williams argues, a way to look at the idea of 'history' more broadly. While this of course can be seen in terms of Gibbon's Diffusionist belief that civilisation, including both agriculture and religion, is an 'accident' and 'Pandora's gift', it also illustrates Gibbon's idea that history is not the record of human interactions, but the relation between humans and the land.[28] In *Scottish Scene* (1934), Gibbon argues that humans and the land combine into a 'dual power' at the same time that the land is 'alien and unendurable' and the humans who work it are 'an alien generation'.[29] That is, the rural economy depicted in *Sunset Song* is tied to a particular moment in the history of civilisation, but the larger question of the relations between humans and the land remains central to any notion of history whatsoever. History is not a record of individual experience, but must be framed collectively.

Yet Gibbon's focus on universal experience led to condemnation of his representation of contemporary politics, especially on the publication of *Grey Granite*. James Barke, for instance, was initially a great supporter of Gibbon's work: in a letter to Gibbon from 1932 he termed *Sunset Song* 'the greatest Scottish book in the English language', while two years later he wrote that the *Quair* as a whole was 'the greatest work of fiction Scotland has produced'.[30] By 1936, however, Barke argued that Gibbon's ignorance 'of the day-to-day actualities of the workers' struggle' prevented him from 'presenting a true and powerfully convincing picture of working-class life'.[31] The abstract 'REAL' of the *Quair* cannot, in Barke's view, adequately convey the nature of reality as it is traditionally perceived, nor can it advance a clear ideological stance. This is perhaps inevitable, despite Gibbon's previously stated declaration that *Cloud Howe* was designed 'to demolish so many superstitions in order to clear the way for the blatant communism of *Grey Granite*'.[32] When Ewan is imprisoned and beaten following the Gowans strike, he finds that he is 'not Ewan Tavendale at all any more but lost and be-bloodied in a hundred broken and tortured bodies all over the world', linked to 'the enslavement and oppression of six thousand years'.[33] Gershom Jezreel, in the previous year's *Image and Superscription* (1933), similarly argues that the continuity of human suffering invalidates ideas of reality itself:

> Reality? What reality might the universe ever hold that was a stay and a guiding star for man, for himself, for the slavering hordes of the barrack-hut, the men who lived and dreamt and died like rats in that sweating rat-run beyond the horizons of the south?[34]

The commonality of all experience precludes the life of any one individual from being considered 'real'; only the land can take that role.

Jezreel's despair is ultimately assuaged, however, by recourse to the printed word. Even as he laments that all history and anthropology prove that men are beasts, he is comforted by the suggestion that 'the Golden Age of the poets' was not a lie but 'just the plain truth'.[35] Such comfort is unavailable to Ewan; even before the strike he argues that representative art has always been deceitful, favouring the 'clean' and avoiding suffering and torture.[36] Instead, it is the transient nature of human suffering, even when it is ever-present, that suggests a new view of history and reality. Late in the novel he returns to the countryside of his childhood:

> And he minded the rolling drummle of names of those hill-hidden touns through the parks of which he'd searched out the flints […]. [Q]ueer he'd never before seen those names for the real things they were, the lives and desirings of many men […]. And he thought of Trease saying that he and the rest of the Reds were nothing, they just worked the will of history and passed….And suddenly Ewan's mind trembled on the verge of something, something that he couldn't name, maybe God, that made this strange play with lives and beliefs: and it seemed a moment that the shambling bus was the chariot of Time let loose on the world roaring down long fir-darkened haughs of history into the shining ways of tomorrow.[37]

If there is no solace in texts, there is still a significance to names; while the lives of individual humans may pass, they still mark the places they have lived. As John Wilson Foster argues elsewhere: 'Named places, sometimes defined and identified by a natural feature […], did not simply generate local lore, but also a topography intimately bound up with families, ownership, [and] genealogy.'[38] The actions and beliefs of any individual human may amount to nothing – indeed, Chris states at the novel's end that all belief leads to '*death or unease*' – but the central relationship between humanity and the land remains important.[39] Ewan curiously distinguishes between the names people give places, which reveal something of themselves, and the names they give their social

identities or beliefs, which are transient. People are 'real' solely, perhaps, in their relation to the land. Likewise, history is figured as essentially external to the actions of particular individuals, while time itself is seen almost as an intrusion. Whatever meaning or reality is available to humanity, then, is founded in place rather than time. As such, any given historical moment is superseded by the ongoing relationship between humans and the land.

From this perspective, the more stereotyped or flat characterisations of both urban life and contemporary politics that Barke criticises can be seen as intentional. Rather than advocating a particular ideology, Gibbon suggests that all ideology is suspect; similarly, the circumstances of any given individual must be seen in relation to the continuity of suffering, rather than valued solely in themselves. Gibbon finishes the novel by again opposing Chris and Ewan's views. Ewan argues that he and Chris must be seen in terms of '*the fight in the end between* FREEDOM *and* GOD'.[40] Chris, on the other hand, sees no possibility for human self-determination, reflecting that the 'Change whose face she'd once feared to see, whose right hand was Death and whose left hand Life, might be stayed by none of the dreams of men, love, hate, compassion, anger or pity, gods or devils or wild crying to the sky'.[41] While much of the political discussion in the novel favours Ewan's perspective, the text as a whole supports Chris's idea that history is only progressive insofar as it reflects constant change, while life and death are the only certainties. As such, it is difficult to agree with Margery Palmer McCulloch's claim that a 'focus on humanity is the principal "meaning" or "message" of the trilogy'.[42] Instead, humanity is only important in its relation to the land, and in its abandonment of specific histories and identities. The novel closes with Chris returning to the standing stones that have been a solace and place of reflection throughout the *Quair* and, in death, finally becoming one with them:

> But she still sat on as one by one the lights went out and the rain came, beating the stones about her, and falling all that night while she still sat there, presently feeling no longer the touch of the rain or hearing the sound of the lapwings going by.[43]

The imagery here repeats Chris's earlier, more mythic reflections on her father's death, where 'the dead walked in a still, clear, deserted land […] and the dead lapwings wheeled and cried against another sun'.[44] Here, however, the referents remain in the physical world: the living and the

dead are known through their relation to the land. The only possible response to change is not to fight for an ideology, but to return, in a very physical way, to the land itself.

This focus on the land at the expense of human volition does not completely negate ideas of history, however. As much as Gibbon emphasises the universal nature of suffering at the expense of individual experience, his portrait of Chris over the course of the *Quair* suggests an opposed perspective on the formation of personal identity. Chris's sense of self is almost always relational: she frames the split between the 'English Chris' and the 'Scottish Chris', or between Chris Guthrie, Chris Colquohoun, and Chris Tavendale, in terms of her immediate interpersonal relationships. In *Cloud Howe*, she considers how remote her earlier life now seems:

> She seemed to stand here by the kirkyard's edge looking back on the stones that marked the years where so many Chrises had died and lay buried – back and back, as the graveyard grew dim, far over those smothered hopes and delights, to […] that Chris that had been. […] Remote and far to think she was YOU![45]

While Chris discards her former identities, the relation between them also constitutes her present self. As Adriana Cavarero argues, '[t]o tell one's own story is to distance oneself from oneself, to double oneself, to make of oneself an other.'[46] The remoteness of Chris's past identities is precisely what allows her to articulate the relation between third- and second-person narration, and to see herself from both internal and external perspectives. Having prophesised 'a Scots Virginia Woolf [who] will astound the Scottish scene', Gibbon here echoes Woolf's portrayal of a self continually reconstituted in relation to memory.[47] His use of the second person, however, also foregrounds the distance between competing ideas of self. Chris is not only myriad selves, each historically located, but also implicitly the reader; indeed, as *A Scots Quair* progresses, the 'you' grows ever more fluid, taking in a wide variety of characters. This shifting voice more subtly parallels Ewan's declarations of common experience: each individual's identity is important not solely in itself, but in relation both to a more universal 'you' and to alternate identities. This is evident not only in Chris's multiple selves, but also the two Ewan Tavendales, who share little but lineage and a name. This principle of opposition even extends to the structure of each novel; the war and the two workers' strikes occupy parallel positions in each text. In each case,

Gibbon emphasises the extent to which apparently significant differences are subsumed into a collective experience based on repetition.

At the same time, however, the 'you' also emphasises the importance of individual histories, since that identity can only be formed through particular experience. This is arguably one of the ways in which an individual can become 'living history'. Each individual carries with them their former selves, all of which become subsumed into 'you'. This mixture of internal and external perspectives allows for a move from the imposed, reified forms of history dismissed throughout the first volume to a more dynamic concept of history. History, finally, lies not in particulars nor in historical record, but in a recognition of the commonality of experience that is achieved by being able to look at oneself from an external perspective. To be history oneself does not mean to understand one's role in history, as the original quote might imply; it is not simply to be at the forefront of a historically notable moment. At the same time, however, it also does not simply suggest, as Cairns Craig argues, that 'history is hellish, and yet it is only through the hell of more history that salvation can be achieved'.[48] Instead, it is to understand oneself as history, to achieve an external perspective on selfhood that simultaneously recognises the commonality of human experience and the myriad divisions of any individual life.

Over the course of *A Scots Quair*, then, Gibbon manages to follow MacDiarmid's predictions for the development of the modern Scottish Renaissance, moving from an initial revaluation of history, largely concentrated in *Sunset Song*, to a more exploratory and philosophical description of contemporary life in *Grey Granite*, mediated by the more conventional social realism of *Cloud Howe*. Rather than providing a forceful conclusion, however, *Grey Granite* moves to the abstract and the fragmentary, both thematically and structurally. Just as the appellation of 'you' grows far more diverse, the narrative sections are often journalistic and interrupted. Even the ending of the novel, where the reader returns to Chris, is arguably ambiguous. Writing some years later, Edwin Muir laments this apparent lack of thematic or explanatory unity in modern fiction:

> Our own order is not a classical order; we have a grasp of origins but not of ends; our existence, like our works, is an unfinished sentence. And the novel describing the life we live is a symptom of the order in which we live; its incompleteness is a reflection of the incompleteness of a whole region of thought and belief.[49]

Yet as much as Gibbon might arguably be illustrating such 'incompleteness', *A Scots Quair* also gestures to a new understanding of both history and society. In a letter from 1935, Neil M. Gunn recognises some of Gibbon's innovation: 'Ahead with it, and let all the cant of "literature" look after itself. This is History, and history like life is born in pain and not in sweet imaginings!'[50] History, for Gunn, must be separated from traditional literary forms. This new conception of history is precisely what Gibbon suggests in the development of the *Quair*. Notably, Gibbon elected not to include the 'Curtain Raiser' to *Grey Granite*, which would have occupied the same structural function as the prelude in *Sunset Song* and the proem in *Cloud Howe*. Ranging from the Greek explorer Pytheas, who is discussed in all three volumes, to Wallace and North Sea trade, the Curtain Raiser focuses on the 'coarse stories' the inhabitants of Dundon would tell 'about their own selves'.[51] Yet such an introduction would maintain the focus on the representation of history established in *Sunset Song*. Instead, *Grey Granite* begins abruptly, with Chris climbing the steps at Windmill Place, stranded in a liminal space that she will occupy for much of the novel. Chris is able to understand origins but not ends, and represents the incompleteness that Muir decries. Yet, as Gunn's letter suggests, while this life born in pain may not be a conventional subject for literature, it allows the reader to perceive history in a new way, as a continual opposition between internal and external experience, and between the individual and the collective.

A Scots Quair, then, is not simply a historical novel, but uses the form to interrogate the relation not only between individuals and history, but also between experience and artistic representation. Despite the solidity of his themes, however, especially his focus on the twin continuities of the land and human suffering, Gibbon both recognises the limitations of the novel form and its capacity for structural, linguistic, and philosophical experimentation. *A Scots Quair* is not only one of the most representative works to be produced in the Scottish Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s, capturing many of its opposing themes, but also suggests new directions for the Scottish novel, including a far more fluid sense of history than can be found in many of Gibbon's contemporaries. As such, it suggests possibilities for both the Scottish novel and the work of cultural memory more broadly that continue to shape the literature of the past eighty years.

CHAPTER FIVE

Gibbon's Libertarian Fictional Politics

Uwe Zagratzki

James Leslie Mitchell has gained a national and international reputation as one of Scotland's outstanding twentieth-century authors under his pen name, Lewis Grassic Gibbon. His immense literary production comprises short stories set in the Middle East and Scotland, scientific fantasies, political novels, essays, city portraits, biographies and book reviews. *A Scots Quair*, a key text of twentieth-century Scottish literature, highly acclaimed by a contemporary critical public on its publication in single volumes between 1932 and 1934, and since, is the climax of a long process of aesthetic and political maturation. Gibbon portrays a Scotland of the people seen from their perspective, mediated through their Scottish tongue. A collective folk narrator with an internalised focus comments on diverse subjects like history, language, class, politics, love, war and, above all, the tribulations of the northeast Scots in the clutches of the capitalist Depression of the pre- and inter-war years. The emphasis is on strong figures, who, whatever distinguishes them from one another, crave liberty. They stand with the freedom-loving mythicised Pictish tribes of northeast Scotland, who for Mitchell are native versions of the primordial Golden Hunters, reconstructed in the texts written under his birth name as archetypes of humanity's original desire for freedom.[1] Idealisation of the supposed natural order of prehistory is fundamental to Mitchell's discourse of freedom, which, however, also includes his interpretation of modern Communism, so far as it serves to surpass current 'civilisation' and assists in regaining free communal life. As he wrote in a 1934 letter, 'Communism we must have before we can have the No-state'.[2] Issues of individual, cultural and political freedom place Mitchell´s counter-hegemonic texts inside the discursive debates of the modern Scottish Renaissance, but also identify them as progressive articulations, spreading their democratic potential more broadly. His work contributes to the revolutionary spirit of the 'Red Decade' of the 1930s.

Recent academic reception has followed diverse routes – the political focus being only one among others – into Mitchell's oeuvre, centring on *A Scots Quair*. Keith Dixon, looking in 2003 insightfully back over thirty years of Gibbon studies and the ensuing canonisation of his work, deplores what he sees as 'a substantial rewriting of his politics, or the erasure of his politics altogether from academic discussion and educational presentation', with the effect that he is 'conveniently shorn of his subversive potentialities'.[3] This chapter agrees with Dixon's radical view, seeking to reinstate Mitchell as 'one of Scotland's rare libertarian revolutionaries'.[4]

Rebellious spirit in the early novels

The four novels examined in this section – *Stained Radiance* (1930), *The Thirteenth Disciple* (1931), *Image and Superscription* (1933) and *Spartacus* (1933) – share a general note of protest against the Depression and ensuing spiritual plight in post-First World War Britain. Mitchell's debut, *Stained Radiance*, took him three years to write before Jarrolds published it in the autumn of 1930.[5] The publisher's acceptance finally ended the author's two-year spell of poverty and hunger while living in London with his wife Ray, earning a meagre living with the Royal Air Force. 'It's an 'ard life, this 'ere authoring – especially when you try to portray life as you see it', Mitchell wrote to his Arbuthnott schoolteacher, Alexander Gray.[6] Drastic realism, possessed with bitter sarcasm and grounded in autobiographical experience, might not exactly meet a mass readership's taste, but Jarrolds's positive assessment after twenty rejections by other publishers paved Mitchell's way to a professional writing career.

The significance of *Stained Radiance* within Mitchell's oeuvre rests on programmatic maxims this Modernist novel sets down. Mitchell sketches a radical philosophy of freedom, charged with Shelley's political Romanticism from his death lament *Adonais* (1821), and proceeds from this powerful source to critical thoughts about the relation between individual rebellion and revolutionary action. Two figures – John Garland and James Storman – exemplify the extreme poles of Mitchell's philosophical quest for a new social order. Whereas Garland leaves his old cynical individualism behind and ends up as secretary of the anarcho-communist party, his development is paralleled by Storman's withdrawal from cold revolutionary 'engineering'.[7] This he replaces with an ardent belief in the ethical potential of the individual. Mitchell's fictitious political party symbolises a romantic anarchism with strong leanings towards Shelley, Bakunin and Kropotkin. According to the teachings of the Russian

anarchists, a social revolution embraces justice, solidarity and mutual help and ensures humanity's ethical progress. Anarchistic communism holds a moral value in that it merges all possible spheres of human liberty – economic, political and individual – into one, thus overcoming doctrinaire socialism's abstract economic materialism. Garland's 'brotherhood of the shamed and tortured' is informed by a rebellious spirit rather than Marxist scientific analysis.[8] Yet, Mitchell emphasises that this does not deny its complicity with Marxism: Storman's musing that 'in the house of communism there are many mansions' is a case in point.[9]

In his quest for irrefutable liberation of humanity from the yoke of any oppression, Mitchell's first novel embraces utopian visions rooted in moral anarchism. *Stained Radiance* can be read as an idealistic extension of the materialist Marxism Mitchell found inadequate for his radical opposition to all existing order. The romantic substance of his philosophy is alluded to in passages about northeast Scotland, when figures either return to or remember their country of birth, and, while the natural world of the Scottish countryside is not meant to be an idyllic resort for the city dweller, as Mitchell showed in many of his essays, most strikingly 'The Land', he employs the general perception of spiritual edification through nature for his notion of an ideal social alternative. This ambivalence will remain a serious component in his future fiction. Indeed, Mitchell's own doubts about a communist alternative are put into Storman's letter of resignation: 'In Russia, a Communist state, I saw the same purposeless disorder as rules in capitalist England; I saw the same aimless enslavement to an archaic economic machine'.[10]

The Thirteenth Disciple is the second novel of Mitchell's literary crusade against the oppressiveness of modern capitalist systems, this time featuring war. Formally an *Entwicklungsroman* ('development novel') based on fictional autobiographical material and 'altered from the first to the third person',[11] the author announced his aims in a letter to H. G. Wells:

> You're reported […] to have said, in reply to a question, that you don't know what steps anti-militarists should take to combat war. […] I think I know, and I preach the idea in my spring novel of 1931, and I'm going to go on preaching it in others. This sums it up, inadequately: *The international organisation of associations pledged to resist war both by passive resistance and sabotage*.[12]

Very much in the tradition of novels of development, Malcom Maudslay, the young protagonist, starts out from a world he feels to be oppressive

and derelict. His goal is to conquer the horizon and 'batter in the Walls of the World'.[13] Malcom shares with his creator the notion of a historical necessity to destroy the old order from whose ruins the new one can evolve and progress. This radicalism locates Mitchell inside the 'lost inter-war generation', whose basic assumption of progress through quest the young Scotsman evidently subscribed to.[14]

The rebellious outsider has an aim in mind, though no clear understanding of the means of achieving it, apart from his vague radicalism. After failing to adapt to the narrow-mindedness of his native Leekan, Malcom moves to Glasgow, where due to the economic crisis affecting entire social groups of the population, he joins the Left Communist Group, which was 'aggressively anti-war and anti-constitutional, and Malcom, crusader against both the challenge of the stars and that savage cruelty which sent old men to beg their bread in the streets, went to the logical extreme of his knighthood'.[15] Thus, Malcom marries his moral idealism to an emotional socialism which assists in paving the way to a universal liberation from 'mindless hopelessness', but is not the aspired end itself: 'And afterwards, afterwards, on a decent earth, there was to be a […] tremendous Something […]. Socialism – I thought it was a planning for that, somehow'.[16] Social justice and the end of economic exploitation are included in the greater utopian aim of ultimate spiritual fulfilment – Malcom's 'misty Something'.[17] He has to learn 'that neither the Adventure nor salvage of the Abyss' lies with either the socialists or any orthodox politico-religiosity.[18] Malcom's misconception of scientific socialism coupled with an emphatic solipsism drives him on to the next stage of his rite of passage. Ruben Valdes-Miyares has pointed to the inherent existentialist pattern in Mitchell's work: angst leads to either escapism or political commitment.[19] Introduced to the anthropological theory of Diffusionism by fellow-soldier Sergeant-Major John Metaxa, Malcom's quest is given a political direction. Diffusionism is informed by the Romantic myth of the natural goodness and original freedom of men and women, speculation traditional anarchists such as Kropotkin also believed in.[20] However, unlike the English Romantics, Grafton Elliot Smith and other anthropologists attempted to give scientific proof of the existence of a primordial Golden Age. With the diffusion of agriculture – first documented in Ancient Egypt – throughout the world, civilisation began to demolish primitive communities like the Mayan culture and terminated the Golden Age of the hunting nomads. Malcom's exposure to their teachings via Metaxa puts the key to the rediscovery of a lost earthly paradise into his hands. But before he finally leaves for the Mexican

jungle to study the Mayan City of the Sun, the retrogressive myth is politicised in the figure of Domina Riddoch. An ardent believer in the myth of the Golden Age – 'Once upon a time there were neither metals nor wars, scandals nor clothes nor kings' – she translates Malcom's romantic anarchism into an anarcho-feminist vision, blaming patriarchy for social repression by way of religion, state and marriage and, ultimately, the extinction of 'matriarchal societies that lined the Seine when the Kelts came West'.[21] Anticipating 'primitive communal anarchy', Domina strives for sexual emancipation and free-love hedonism as forms of resistance on the way to universal emancipation of all individuals.[22] Her self-confident ways resonate with Shelley's question '[c]an man be free if woman be a slave?'[23] Domina persuades Malcom to found a group of war resisters called the 'Secular Control Group (New Satanists)'. This was modelled on the radical pacifist Promethean Society of which Mitchell was a member between 1929 and 1932, which met at the Rose Street club in Soho, an anarchistic centre, according to George Woodcock, since the nineteenth century.[24] Domina also supports Malcom's final departure to Mexico – where he dies while Domina gives birth to their son in London – after the group refuses to accept sabotage as a legitimate means of resisting war, the epitome of a rotten civilisation.

The Thirteenth Disciple draws on sources as diverse as Christian brotherhood, romantic social dreaming, revolutionary socialism and anarchistic utopianism: united in the vision of human freedom, the separate threads in the novel knit together to make one multi-faceted utopian discourse. The author's refusal to weld together the various strands into a coherent central ideology invites readers from across the political spectrum to re-read the novel for their personal political predilection. Hence Mitchell's libertarian aesthetics lie at the heart of his discourse of freedom, the merger of natural freedom and revolutionary socialism in one figure remaining a vague possibility '[w]hen the shades of Karl Marx and Ahmekat Tutul Xiu join hands'.[25]

Image and Superscription synthesises ingredients from the previous novels: the young hero Gershom Jezreel's fundamental alienation from his social environment is combined with the motive of quest or the juxtaposition of individual and society. The protagonist's estrangement is caused by his father´s religious fanaticism, which epitomises another oppressive component in the discourse of power Mitchell dissects:

> They were hooded eyes […] and I feared them, terrifying eyes, especially at those times when they vanished from his face and betook themselves

> to the face of that spitting and hitting and tortured Thing, the 'Good-God-what-an-image' of my childhood fantasy. […] And it came in time to be all the dark, wild, dreadful things of human life, it came to be humankind itself on the darkened stage of the universe. The Image became for him Man.[26]

Opposition to religious tyranny is Gershom's initial impulse for his continued search. Whether secular pícaro, modern Ulysses, or Ahasver, the wandering Jew, there is always emphatic hope placed on individuals in pursuit of values they see extinguished by a corrupt civilisation. Gershom travels from England to a Mayan archaeological site in the Mexican jungle to study the Edenic dawn of human culture, thus indicating the outstanding importance Mitchell assigned to archaeologists and explorers in his oeuvre, something originating in their inquisitive nature and their idealised role in Mitchell's visionary concepts.[27] He returns to the European battlefields of the First World War and eventually ends up in an artists' community in Minnesota. Their free lifestyle, in particular the nudity cult, which was very popular in the 1920s, resembles Diffusionist notions of an early Arcadia. In the shape of an anti-Darwinist parable, Gershom's travels symbolically trace humanity's social evolution from paradisal freedom to authoritarian oppression and back to earthly paradise revisited.

Mitchell's ideas of Christianity can be compared to Bakunin's *Dieu et l'État* (God and the State, 1882–83). For the Russian anarchist the roots of all types of authoritarian structures lie in the belief in God's power. Once in the world, Bakunin continues, this spawns dehumanising ideologies like nationalism, fascism, racism or xenophobia. Set against the life-denying ideologies of modern civilisation, 'War, Religion and Kings, Classes and Envies', the novel propagates, on the grounds of pseudo-scientific anthropology and a mistaken Rousseauesque ideal, the purity of a 'natural' social order manifested in prehistoric times.[28] In the end, *Image and Superscription* stands as a literary supplement to Mitchell's essay 'Religion'.[29] Along with his unfinished project 'Story of Religion', the three texts proceed on the assumption that 'Natural Man was fundamentally irreligious'.[30] It takes courageous, rebellious moralists to restore the idealised myth of an original earthly paradise. Typically, the emancipation of the individual has a cosmopolitan rather than selfish character as it – in the existentialist vein – comprises the emancipation of all the oppressed. '*How shall it profit a man though he gain his own soul and lose the whole world?*' is Mitchell's subversive reading

of a New Testament with which he deliberately takes liberties for his own radical ends.[31]

Interpreting Mitchell's early novels' philosophical context, rather than discussing their technical flaws, brings an awareness of the humanist undercurrent present in each. They live less by their aesthetic thrill and more by the effect they leave on the reader. The flat characterisation of the figures is subject to this goal. 'All great literature was great propaganda', Mitchell once stated, and this is efficiently put into practice when he sifts through all sorts of counter-discourses in order to filter out their libertarian substance.[32] Reminding the reader of lost traditions and myths, revisiting familiar sources (the Wandering Jew), texts (the Bible) and unfamiliar symbols (reverse crucifixion) and utilising literary techniques for new ends not only identify him as the cultural archaeologist he was, but also place Mitchell inside the broad discourse of political, cultural and literary alternatives antagonistic to unbridled capitalism and fascism's life-destroying forces in the 1930s. His fiction is written as social commitment predicated on the author's inner urge. *Littérature engagée* participates most clearly in the conflicts of the age, in that it dissects social wrongs and moral injustice.[33] That Mitchell 'found his inspiration not so much in the work of […] Kropotkin or Bakunin […] but rather in the pseudo-scientific speculations of Professor Grafton Elliot Smith', as Dixon argues, is debatable, since he chiefly utilised the anarchistic side of Diffusionism.[34] He was always ready to disclaim the Diffusionists 'for not following out their conclusions to the logical extreme and attacking contemporary religion, morals, ethics, [and] politics'.[35]

In August 1933, *Spartacus*, Mitchell's most renowned novel under his real name, was published. Unsurprisingly, the figure of the historic slave leader had held sway over a writer whose libertarian outlook dominated his fictional politics and political fiction. Spartacus's appeal to Mitchell as a powerful symbol of undying longing for freedom and indefatigable solidarity with the downtrodden shines through numerous passages in his oeuvre, culminating in a poem, 'Spartacus', published posthumously, and the novel of that name.[36] In Mitchell's private gallery of legendary heroes, Spartacus shares company with other charismatic leaders as diverse as Jesus Christ, with whom the slave leader is implicitly compared in poem and novel, the Scottish patriot William Wallace, the German Spartacists Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, the communards of the Paris Commune, and the Soviet Communist Vladimir Lenin.[37] Mitchell made his charismatic leaders stand out by their unremitting identification

with the common people and, due to his outstanding empathy, Spartacus is *primus inter pares* of Mitchell's model rebels.[38]

As Mitchell's projected novel on William Wallace was never completed, *Spartacus* remains the only novel published under his birth name in which the lower classes are made over into subjects of history and historic events are narrated from their perspective. For the first time in Mitchell's prose we find the rebellious hero amidst the very masses his entire intellectual and spiritual life is dedicated to. With *Spartacus* Mitchell's political fiction takes the step from individual revolt to mass actions verging on revolution. Two revolutionary patterns are juxtaposed: on the one hand, a technocratic-bureaucratic structure modelled upon Plato's centralised state; on the other, a libertarian model. The Greek eunuch Kleon represents the rational-logical version of the slaves' liberation. His aim is to build a centralised slave state in which Spartacus transforms from model rebel to model tyrant and which would successfully stand up to the Roman Empire: 'the land we dream is Italy, *we* its Masters, not its slaves […]. There is your leader. He might change the order in Italy as no man before […;] he could seize and hold all Southern Italy, and carve it out the state that Plato dreamt'.[39] Kleon's model follows a Platonic rationale with no regard to its citizens' other, non-rational, demands. Happiness would be part of a greater scheme cared for by a totalitarian state of the kind Aldous Huxley pictured in *Brave New World*. The loss of libertarian quality in such utopias of organised happiness is given a succinct expression in Kleon's sexuality which excludes him from a full human existence, consequently casting a dystopian shadow on his state model. His Platonic love for the slaves originates in intellectual anti-humanism. It is for Elpinice, Spartacus's lover and another of Mitchell's far-sighted female rebels, to correct the shortcomings in Kleon's scheme. Her social dreaming, grounded in the awareness of the unlimited rational and emotional creativity of every individual, comprises an anarchistic utopia of the people: '"Spartacus and the slaves are one", said Kleon. "For the Leader is the People." Then Elpinice spoke […]. "Yet I think a time will come when men will swear by the people alone."'[40]

Platonic construct or anarchistic ideal, Spartacus rises to his leadership while maturing morally and intellectually by means of an incessant empathy for the slaves. At times he appears the superhuman embodiment of history's dark side, 'as though he were all of the hungered dispossessed of all time […] merging his spirit in that of the horde, his body in that of a thousand bodies'.[41] Unlike his rebellious predecessors Storman,

Maudslay and Gershom, he is ready for collective action, provided the revolt disclaims violation of the moral principles on behalf of which it broke out. Spartacus is at pains to balance the means and ends of the slaves' upheaval with the aim of ending Roman state power and not simply replacing it with another tyranny under a new label. Mitchell safeguards Spartacus's ethics of freedom by associating the freedom fighter with Jesus Christ's egalitarian humanism. Kleon's vision on the cross at the end of the novel underpins the two complementary sides of the same revolutionary coin: 'he saw before him, gigantic […] a great Cross with a figure that was crowned with thorns; and behind it […] the figure of a Gladiator. And he saw these Two were One, and the world yet theirs'.[42] In the face of 1930s fascist and Stalinist totalitarianism, the novel radically negates any social order linked to power and its concomitant ideologies. It persistently promotes Mitchell's libertarian definition of socialism for which the social responsibility and decency of even the lowest members of a society – in Mitchell's phrase from *Stained Radiance*, 'Individual Liberty and Righteous Soul of the common People'[43] – would be indispensable. Mitchell's opposition to doctrinaire socialism, however, would not include a rejection of historical materialism, as he sees history as a succession of class wars born out of antagonistic interests between social classes. Accordingly, exploitation and the deprivation of rights do not result from the individual viciousness of individual masters but from objective class antagonism. When the slave army therefore turns against Rome, it metaphorically tries to conquer the centre of power, where the key to their emancipation lies. But this is the furthest the author permits Marxist thoughts to enrich the story. Unhampered by the few historical sources of the slave revolt, Mitchell's political parable takes liberties with the little factual information he had.[44] He uses the gaps of historical knowledge to propagate the ideal of a classless, anarchistic order, which rejects any mere reversal of power relations and can only be attained by the revolutionary impulse of the common people. Not surprisingly, the slave army turns into a carnivalesque horde, drunken with joy about its self-directed course to freedom. Leaders, charismatic and noble, fuse into the revolting masses and act as what Bakunin calls 'invisible pilots in the people's tempest'.[45] Spartacus has strong feelings about this: 'It is only the slaves themselves that can do that. Not you or I alone. We are here to lead. We pass. But they endure.'[46] Even if, at a particular historical moment, the plebeian tempest does not blow strongly enough to do away with its adversaries, there is no need for despair, as the concluding vision shows.

The libertarian message is paralleled by a libertarian formal structure consisting of a collective voice (a fundamental narrative device in *A Scots Quair*), reversed pyramidal chapter compositions, and the aesthetic interference with historical sources for the sake of transporting the parabolic elements of the historical novel more efficiently. With liberty and oppression the eternal antagonists, Spartacus's historic significance arises from symbolising the universal principle at a particular moment of history: 'unless the beast that squatted in the Seven Hills were killed there would be no possible life ever again for *men* while the *world* endured'.[47] Flawed aesthetic transformations of politics, in particular the idealistic, non-dialectic portrayal of the great leader, may partly owe to Mitchell's political idealism. Still, the writer's personal mantra, 'I am a revolutionary writer […]. I hate capitalism; all my books are explicit or implicit propaganda', comes to life in *Spartacus*, since the novel pays respect to the balance of political action and moral ethos in the pursuit of the just cause.[48] In addition, the aesthetic struggle for a symbiosis of materialist and idealist interpretations of history attains a new quality with this novel.

Spartacus stands out from the rest of Mitchell's novels as it introduces to his fiction the political category of class, and hence historical materialism, as an elaborate medium to investigate social orders. The individuals' frustration with the given, as much as the driving impulse which propels them into some kind of action, transmutes into collective action and the humanism of an entire class. In the end, despite the partially Marxist perception of history, the libertarian aesthetics and the political vision of the revolting slaves speak from an anarchistic version of socialism. As a consequence, political literature and anarchistic politics merge in *Spartacus*. In general, anarchism itself is seen by Mitchell as a species of fictional (which is not tantamount to non-existent) politics.[49] The political author's morality and imagination, like the anarchist's pure idealism, draw on similar sources – like the natural goodness of humans and their capacity for freedom – for their inspiration. Mitchell's songs of freedom express silent desires and, simultaneously, are incentives to aspire to their fulfilment in the material shape of books, also a species of fictional politics.

Utopia revisited

A close reading of Mitchell's complete works retrieves the author's ambitious search for the utopian potential in canonical texts and traditional genres. The setting in *The Lost Trumpet* (1932) and the short stories

published in the *Cornhill Magazine* (1929–32), subsequently collected in *The Calends of Cairo* (1931) and *Persian Dawns, Egyptian Nights* (1932), is post-First World War Cairo and the Egyptian desert. There a handful of war-traumatised Europeans – '[h]umanity in little' – from different walks of life happen to meet.[50] Locked within the walls of a civilisation, the characters, through inner contemplation, seek a way out of their existential dilemma. The desert – the analogy with Jesus Christ's refuge in the New Testament is apparent – sets an appropriate stage on the way to spiritual healing. The road to social and political commitment and reform is reopened, in accordance with the anarchistic hypothesis of the leading role of the socially de-classed, when the metaphorical trumpet of Jericho (Joshua 6. 1–27) is sounded by the Egyptian prostitute Huth Rizq and breaks down the mental walls, the questers' spiritual inertia. Mitchell's subversive reading of biblical metaphors (the plague of the locusts, the garden of Eden, New Jerusalem, the trumpet of Jericho), archetypes (the mother, anima) and Christian motifs of redeeming love opposes orthodox exegesis and lays bare the utopian potential enclosed in the Scripture. Indeed, Ernst Bloch considers the trumpet signal – for example, in the final act of Beethoven's opera *Fidelio* – an 'archetype of the highest utopian standing'.[51] Mitchell's fiction, constituting his literary revolt against the tyranny of the existing, draws from sources generally not acknowledged for their utopian but, rather, their moral inspiration. With *The Lost Trumpet* he returns to a Christian mindset, as exemplified by the Bible, less for its prescriptive doctrines than for its moral value system. The novel subscribes to a rhetoric of freedom that unremittingly points forward to revitalising the cosmopolitan utopian ideals of Ur-Christianity: 'God's Man – who hasn't heard of all the ideal nationals as God's Englishman, God's German, God's Spaniard – […] God's Man is the synthesis of the lot'.[52] For Mitchell a mundane Christ is the prototype of egalitarian humanism and the inspiration of moral reform. All great heroes – among whom Mitchell adds his version of an anarcho-communist Prometheus – excel in their egalitarian love of the masses; unlike Nietzsche's Zarathustra, they reject an elitist superhuman morality.[53] Mitchell's programmatic statement that his 'art is implicit anarchy' gains some value in *The Lost Trumpet* as he translates what is claimed to be a utopian Bible discourse into another version of his libertarian fiction.[54] A staunch cosmopolitanism is part of this, but one unfortunately flawed by the Western cliché of the Orient Mitchell perpetuates. Whether falling back on an image of the East, fed by romantic tales of Scheherazade, storyteller of the *Arabian Nights*, or by the Diffusionist belief in the

East as the source of global regeneration, the historical Orient is scaled down to an exotic non-European Other. In particular, the *Cornhill* stories exploit the traditional Western image of the mystical Orient rather than biblical imagery.[55]

Radical political literature implies the inexorable analysis of present orthodoxies in all their guises. In Mitchell's work this means weeding out the roots of power and planting the tree of freedom he sees deeply ingrained in natural social instincts, natural sovereignty and moral perfectibility. Prehistoric primitive communities stand for the practicability of the ideal. Consequently, social and moral progress is affected by a rediscovery of values buried beneath civilisation's layers. The fictional return to the cradle of humanity coupled with a prospective look into the distant future are the prominent features of the scientific fantasies *Three Go Back* (1932) and *Gay Hunter* (1934).

Aesthetically, these novels follow H. G. Wells's idea of the dominance of human aspects over technical ones, and because of their treatment of political systems in a fictitious state they are defined as utopian texts: for Ian Campbell, 'Mitchell used [science fiction] to create a framework for his statement regarding his own times'.[56] The novels are fictionalised forms of Diffusionist theories. Mitchell had been exchanging correspondence with the leading theoreticians around the publication date of *Three Go Back*, including a complimentary letter from Harold John Massingham, whose notion of the Golden Age had a lasting impact on Mitchell's writing: 'there is the Golden Age which has existed intermittently throughout the history of civilisation as a tradition of poetry, a mould of ideas, a dynamic urge to the reconstruction of the social fabric and an inspiration to the heart of man'.[57] Three stages of social evolution are highlighted: ur-communism, the fascist present, and a post-fascist future, with an emphasis on the second in *Gay Hunter*. The warning against fascism had left traces in works prior to his science fiction, and in 1934 he wrote to Neil M. Gunn: 'I loathe Fascism, and all the other dirty things that hide under the name'.[58] Cuthbert Graham pointed out the specific non-materialist essence of Mitchell's theory of fascism, 'in which the ultra-modern disease of Fascism is the same as the barbarism of the cannibal', but ignores considerable changes in the author's grasp of fascism in the course of *Gay Hunter*.[59]

Three Go Back stands in line with traditional time travel fiction. Three survivors of a mid-Atlantic airship crash find themselves stranded on a lonely island. When encountering a group of hunters they learn that they have travelled 25,000 years back in time to legendary Atlantis. Mitchell

uses this scenario to modify the familiar pattern of his other protest novels by introducing a direct comparison of social fabrics. Drawing on Kropotkin's reflections about the eternal 'flow of mutual help', Mitchell draws up an idealised egalitarian community of golden hunters living a simple life in peace and led by their social instincts.[60] In contrast to the purity of the imagined hunters' free life, he juxtaposes the vices and destructiveness of complex political systems in twentieth-century Britain – and civilisation in general – from which the time travellers arrived. Militarism – one of the figures is an arms trader – and war stand out as distinctive characteristics of modern societies. Mitchell's doubts about the regenerative capabilities of the existing political orders not only make him look back to the allegedly pure origin of human history, but prove him to be an idealistic utopian libertarian rather than a Marxist materialist: that he wishes history's course could be altered by interfering with the past is a case in point.[61] Yet, if freedom is at stake, the political writer resorts to other progressive ideologies for its defence. Despite his non-dogmatic Left position Mitchell's analysis of fascism, facing the real threat manifested in Mussolini's and Hitler's rise to power, includes historical materialism. In *Three Go Back* militarism and concomitant ideologies of power and their opposites (pacifism, solidarity) are described evolving from two antithetical sides, Mitchell drawing a direct line from the Neanderthals to contemporary militarists. Two years later, in the wake of Nazi usurpation of power, in *Gay Hunter* the anthropological approach is soft-pedalled. Instead a materialistic explanation identifies the crisis of capitalist over-production and 'every civilisation's internal contradictions' to be the main causes of the rise of fascism.[62]

Mitchell's understanding of fascism's innate aggressiveness in 1934 would not yet find an adequate response in British foreign policy, but was to sensitise the broader public to the latent violence of the British Union of Fascists.[63] Standing 'at the crossroads' was the call of the day for British intellectuals, and Mitchell's scientific fantasies mark him off as a political writer equipped with the broad intellectual insight and emotional empathy to shake his contemporaries awake.[64] With the foremost intention being to warn, the synthesis of Marxist means and libertarian ends also points to a post-fascist, anti-authoritarian future. This may explain why specific details of the new social fabric remain mere speculation. Mitchell's anarchistic understanding of history endorses a politics of spontaneous action responding to current needs. Chief among anarchistic politics is the negation of power and private property.

Anti-authoritarian impulses denounce watertight political concepts, so that anarchism manifests itself – apart from a positivist belief in natural social instincts and a few basic patterns of co-operation – *ex negativo* through the absence of ideological givens. Provided this is agreed upon, the time leaps back and forth into the free communities of natural men and women are the most radically spontaneous revolts. Complementary to a negation of state utopias – here more in line with William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890) – the strict rationality of the Marxist analysis of history with which Mitchell generally sympathised is sweetened with a social dreaming. This cares more for the readers' affections, hopes and natural potential of rebelliousness rather than for the logic of scientifically verified historical progress or the restoration of primitive lifestyles. Hence, what Malcolm calls the 'sardonic principle' in Mitchell's aesthetics reads as an anarchistic interpretation of the transitory nature of artistic ideals.[65]

Writing from the people's Scotland

Mitchell's fame is almost entirely grounded on the fiction published under his pen name Lewis Grassic Gibbon. It includes the short stories 'Greenden' (December 1932), 'Smeddum' (January 1933), 'Clay' (February 1933), all first published in *The Scots Magazine*, 'Sim' (June 1933) in *The Free Man*, and 'Forsaken' (June 1934), which he wrote for *Scottish Scene*, edited in collaboration with Hugh MacDiarmid. The greatest acclaim he received was for the trilogy *A Scots Quair*, consisting of *Sunset Song* (1932), *Cloud Howe* (1933) and *Grey Granite* (1934).

The most drastic change in comparison with the works written under his birth name is the substantial 'Scotification' of his fiction. All settings are Scottish, chiefly found in northeast Scotland, but the crucial innovation is the implementation of a collective narrator using a version of northeast Scottish Lallans, or Braid Scots, throughout the texts. Gibbon had taken a deliberate choice with an eye on Modernist experiments:

> The technique of Lewis Grassic Gibbon in his trilogy *A Scots* Quair […] is to mould the English language into the rhythms and cadences of Scots spoken speech, and to inject into the English vocabulary such minimum number of words from Braid Scots as that remodelling requires.[66]

His political humanism governs aesthetic innovation as his democratic narrative technique relates to the demotic ways and speech patterns of

ordinary Scottish people. Gibbon's fiction bears witness to the pride he felt to be of peasant stock and his sympathy for the peasants. He named them 'the aristocracy of the earth, the ploughmen and the peasants. These are the real rulers of Scotland: they are the rulers of the earth!'; and, with a hint of the role they would have to play in his political visions, they are '[t]he world's great Green International awaiting the coming of its Spartacus'.[67] His polyphonic narrators spring from peasant and working-class communities, so that their authentic stream-of-consciousness technique claims the readers' unrestricted attention for their cultures, histories and world views. Into this folk culture he transplants the early Arcadias from his Mitchell novels.

The 'internal dialogue' between the two strands of his discourse of freedom we have become familiar with is continued in his Scottish work.[68] Primarily, *A Scots Quair* constitutes the common aim of anarchism and Marxism which is the liberation of humanity from capitalistic dehumanisation. But while Marxism supplies the revolutionary means, a 'stark, sure creed that will cut like a knife, a surgeon's knife through the doubt and disease', the anarchistic contribution is to see to the organisation of a post-revolutionary society predicated on absolute freedom.[69] Because of his ideological restrictions, the revolutionary leader, Ewan Tavendale, lacks the vision to fuse his mother's idealistic humanism with his historical determinism. Yet, Gibbon poses the utopian possibility of synthesising private revolt and collective revolution by dint of a double ending to *Grey Granite* and *A Scots Quair*: Ewan is going to join the Communist Party in London to get the revolution under way, while his mother Chris's return to her birth place Cairndhu reconnects her parabolically to never-failing sources of the free Pictish spirit.

Any absolute final assessment of Mitchell's or Gibbon's literary works would fail to do justice to the texts and to future readers, as each era rereads historical texts for their own manifold ends. For our purposes, however, a political rereading of Mitchell's works at present has, firstly, to place them in the cultural contexts of his age and, secondly, to disapprove of the depoliticising standards of postmodernist theories in order to make greater sense of his literature. Once both are accomplished we encounter a 'literature [that] is a guide to action […] by telling us what it is that we want'.[70] It is *littérature engagée* because it applies the author's commitment and his participation in the struggles of the times to literature. By keeping alive what he assumes to be immanent human needs of social dreaming and moral regeneration, Mitchell's political fiction

exploits the basic tenets of the fictional politics of anarchism and hence belongs to a special branch of *littérature engagée*.[71] Furthermore, his position within the British radical Left in the 1930s is decidedly characterised by a Scottish non-conformity. This creative multiplicity should qualify him for recognition in political and cultural debates – current and yet to come – about Scotland's future.

CHAPTER SIX

Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Women

Glenda Norquay

A Scots Quair (1932–34), Lewis Grassic Gibbon's most famous work, is striking in its engagement with that 'difference of value' identified by Virginia Woolf in 1928 as a key issue for women writers.[1] The interest in strong female characters, the focus on female friendships as well as male-female relationships, an attention to the rhythms of women's lives, the articulation of dangerous questions around sexuality and contraception and, above all, in the character of Chris Guthrie, the centring voice of a female consciousness, combine to present a significant challenge to the literary politics of gender. When Gibbon's contemporary Helen B. Cruickshank first read the trilogy's first novel *Sunset Song* (1932) she believed it to be written by a woman, perceived feminine traits in the writing and described her mother's own enthusiasm for the novel.[2] More recently, feminist critic Deirdre Burton notes that when reading the trilogy she had to remind herself it was not written by a 'modern female writer, who wrote from women's cultural experience'.[3] Lewis Grassic Gibbon's fiction appears then to speak for and to its women readers; in his other writing, as James Leslie Mitchell, the author's interest in sexual politics is just as evident. Yet, while the radicalism of Mitchell's novels receives little attention in accounts of Scottish feminist writing, both feminist and nationalist critiques of his fiction as Gibbon have asked difficult questions about the representation of women, his deployment of female characters and the gendered implications of his literary forms. This chapter explores the complicated dynamics of the relationship between J. Leslie Mitchell, Lewis Grassic Gibbon and women, assessing his engagement with feminism, debates around his representation of female experience and the wider politics of his writing, and concludes by comparing his writing to female writers from northeast Scotland.

Whether because of a personal fascination, the centrality to his life of an intellectually dynamic marriage, or a recognition that women in

this period serve to embody the modern moment and therefore presented the richest subject for fiction, both the novels of James Leslie Mitchell and the fiction of Lewis Grassic Gibbon operate through a particularly powerful attention to women and women's issues. His fiction displays a keen engagement with the preoccupations of feminist thinking at the time and in particular with links between sexual oppression, birth control and marriage as emotional and economic exploitation. In *The Thirteenth Disciple*, a 1931 James Leslie Mitchell novel which flirts with the semi-autobiographical, the central character, Malcom Maudslay, initiates the founding of a radical 'politico-social society'.[4] Although its members can barely agree about the society's intentions they produce an eleven-point plan with the first three aims directed to addressing the position of women: 'Abolition of the Legal Status of Marriage; State Propaganda and Enforcement of Birth Control; [and] a General Tax to be levied for the Endowment of Each Woman's First Two Children'.[5] Rather than adopting the language of equal rights and constitutional representation which had informed the women's suffrage campaigns, in their challenge to the deeper economic underpinnings of oppression Mitchell's imagined radicals hearken back to early twentieth-century feminist thinkers such as Cicely Hamilton in *Marriage as a Trade* (1909) and Olive Schreiner in *Women and Labour* (1911), both of whom give historical context to the conditions in which women are forced into 'parasitism'.[6] Like his character Maudslay, Mitchell was particularly exercised by the oppression of women through the burden of child-bearing, a consistent theme in his fiction. As the suicide in *Sunset Song* of Chris Guthrie's mother on finding that she is again pregnant suggests, he recognised the psychological and economic damage created by an absence of birth control. The majority of his novels in one way or another present the case for its liberating effect, a point most explicit in *Cloud Howe* (1933) in which Else the housekeeper 'listened with red-tinted ears, and stammered and blushed' at the advice given by Chris to avoid further pregnancies.[7] The complaint of Cicely Hamilton, that women are regarded 'not as a human being with certain physical and mental qualities which enable her to bring children into the world and cook a dinner, but as a breeding-machine and the necessary adjunct to a frying pan', echoes throughout his writing.[8]

Gibbon also makes the more radical case for women to be understood as active in their sexuality. Not only are female characters in his realist novels, such as Chris Guthrie and her prototype Thea Mayven (*Stained Radiance*, 1930), shown as taking the sexual initiative, but Mitchell uses his fantasy fiction to present, in the most positive terms possible, a world

of sexual freedom. The utopian society explored in the scientific fantasy *Three Go Back* (1932) suggests a primitive ideal in which women have equal freedom in their choice of sexual partner – '[t]hey mated as they chose, those golden women' – and depicts contemporary women as less hindered by the conventional moralities which induce shame in their male counterparts.[9] While the two men within the group of time travellers resist the mating rituals of their new world, central consciousness Clair Stranlay finds liberation:

> A lover of the dark days! A lover dead and dust twenty-five thousand years before she had been born! What dream was this that had led her feet from a Kensington flat to that running across the hills from the mating place of the dawn men?[10]

The focus on women in his fiction is also used to sustain a wider left-wing analysis of power.[11] In 'Forsaken' (1934), a Gibbon short story in which Christ is imagined returning to an Aberdeen household, the perspective of Jess Gordon, abused and sexually exploited by her employer, serves as one of the most powerful indictments of the 'fallen' world in which this figure finds herself: 'But she couldn't do anything else, she'd her job to hold on to, lot of use to find herself sacked, on the Broo, and father with work only now and then'.[12] Economic deprivation, social injustice and sexual oppression create a dark triangle in which the woman is most centrally imprisoned. Mitchell's 'The Road' (1929) is even more explicitly political: set in Egypt, this short story shows British woman Jane Hatoun organising a Women's League of Al-Islam and eventually sacrificing her life for the future of other women.[13] Through exploring oppression in a specific context the author articulates a broader critique of social structures which bear heavily upon, and yet are most explicitly challenged by, women.

While the author's social agenda may lead to depictions of women as victims of sexual and economic oppression, these are outweighed by compelling images of a strong and challenging femininity. The situation of women at the centre of his fiction allows full exploration of female experience, but also of the ways in which it is possible to triumph over constraints. There are, however, significant differences in how this is achieved in Gibbon's 'Scottish' and Mitchell's 'non-Scottish' work. Keith Dixon, identifying Mitchell's fiction as explicitly more political, notes that its central female characters tend to be middle class and articulate a fuller political understanding.[14] Characters such as Domina Riddoch

in *The Thirteenth Disciple* (1931), Clair Stranlay in *Three Go Back*, Gay Hunter in the novel of that name (1934) and Thea in *Stained Radiance* all present lively, intelligent characters who express a relatively monologic interrogation of dominant gender roles and sexual mores. In that sense they appear as 'exceptional'. Yet these bold women – with the exception perhaps of Thea Mayven, who is more clearly a product of conflicts between her Scottish roots and her London existence, and more contradictorily driven by needs for romance and for independence – appear fully formed in their conscious desire to challenge societal norms and in their confidence to enact that challenge. Domina, Gay, Clair and even Ester Caldon in *Image and Superscription* (1933) face adventures, but from the outset of each novel their status as 'new' women is never in doubt. In the fantasy fiction in particular the imperative of each plot is towards constructing a world in which this innovative sense of self might find its fullest articulation. Indeed, the impossibility of accommodating a reconciliation between the vision of a brave new woman and a critique of the tired old world may suggest why, after *Stained Radiance*, Mitchell increasingly entered the domains of science fiction and fantasy.

Gibbon's fiction, inherently less explicit than Mitchell's in articulating a manifesto and drawing the reader much more powerfully into identification with characters and scenes, still deploys female characters as a means of envisaging alternative worlds. As *A Scots Quair* and short stories such as 'Smeddum' (1933) demonstrate, characters drawn by Gibbon are more likely to produce a woman-centred empathy with realms of female experience and the ways in which women negotiate the demands of their worlds. The characters themselves are less one-dimensionally exceptional; combining both representative and unique qualities, they are also more clearly defined by the demands of a specific social reality. Gibbon is, however, consistently alert to the complexity of this dynamic. In 'Smeddum' he created in Meg Menzies an exceptional figure, who apparently challenges gender roles in a relatively stereotypical way: she is strong, forceful, works like a man and runs the household instead of her partner, Will: 'She did half his work in the Tocherty parks, she'd yoke up the horse and the sholtie together, and kilt up her skirts till you'd see her great legs, and cry *Wissh!* like a man and turn a fair drill'.[15] Yet, while the community around her perceives Meg's challenge as inhering in this inversion of gender roles, her real radicalism is revealed at the story's conclusion when she acknowledges that she had never married Will and could not make up her mind whether to do so; for this reason she refuses to force her own daughter to marry. The challenge to gendered conventions here is

more sophisticated than the simple adoption of a masculine role in public; instead the story addresses agency in the personal domain to present more profound questions about gendered identity. With Chris Guthrie and other memorable characters in *A Scots Quair*, such as Else in *Cloud Howe* and Ellen and Ma Cleghorn in *Grey Granite* (1934), Gibbon is interested in the ways women might retain elements of control, whether through a retreat into interiority, into apparent masculinity, through sexuality, or even through physical stamina and endurance.

If Mitchell's fiction is striking in its direct questioning of moral and social codes which oppress women, the power of Gibbon's fiction lies in the complexity with which it convincingly represents those constraints while retaining the space to challenge them. Gibbon's narrative strength is that he can embody a conservative conformist community perspective which condemns innovative women while at the same time inducing in the reader an imaginative admiration for these challenging characters. By oscillating between the unsympathetic or critical voices of the communities they inhabit, and the women in whom he is most interested, he moves beyond the representation of impossibly challenging female characters (as arguably appear in Mitchell's fiction) to a broader but more implicit delineation of gender oppression. In his 'Scottish' writing Gibbon succeeds in producing an effect in which readers often read against the narrative voice. As a result they identify with those who stand against the conformity of the community. In *Sunset Song*, for example, Chris's burgeoning relationship with Reverend Colquohoun is articulated in the voice of the community as: 'ay, Chris Tavendale had feathered her nest right well, the sleeked creature, who would have thought it of her?', whereas the reader is educated into sympathy with a shift in tone and consciousness:

> But they saw the minister was standing behind her, waiting for her, they'd the last of the light with them up there, and maybe they didn't need it or heed it, you can do without the day if you've a lamp quiet-lighted and kind in your heart.[16]

For the reader, fully engaged from the first novel in the trilogy into the consciousness of Chris, it is inevitable that the more sensitive and neutrally voiced interpretation takes precedence over the prurient 'speak' of the community: because of this we are drawn to the challenging woman while still fully aware of the world in which she has to function.

More than most male writers, and whichever name he was writing under, Gibbon employs intelligent, strong female characters as focalisers in his fiction. Although other writers of the modern Scottish Renaissance attend to the power of strong women, their deployment is much more obviously in terms of a 'symbolic feminine', in which the 'mysteries' of womanhood become emblematic of universal mystical powers.[17] Among the many notable instances of this in the fiction of Neil M. Gunn, Kenn, in *Highland River* (1937), sees '[t]he abiding calm of his mother, old as the earth', and in *Butcher's Broom* (1934) the character of Dark Mairi seems 'endowed with the uncanny quality of coming out of, and disappearing into, the earth at will'.[18] In Hugh MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926) the symbolic feminine resides with the poem's 'silken leddy', while the waiting Jean functions as a contextualising presence for the interior struggles of the poem's male protagonist.[19] With Mitchell/Gibbon, however, the complexity and liveliness of his female creations ensures that his writing is woman-centred, producing that empathetic reaction in his female readers as described by Burton.

The compelling figure of Chris Guthrie has most obviously captured the imagination of readers and critics, but her precursor, Thea Mayven, also produces a forceful engagement with female identity and anticipates that nuanced representation of split subjectivity that Burton sees as such a strikingly female characteristic of Gibbon's writing in the *Quair*:

> Her body had grown and changed and discarded. But her mind had retained, sifted away into different compartments of the subconscious, all the dross and dregs of vision and experience. The thought-whorls grew the more complex; below them, memories jostled the thicker. And, strangely antagonistic to the logic of these, ever more definite grew that consciousness that was now almost conscious of itself, that whispering knowledge of 'I'.[20]

Isobel Murray has made a strong case for seeing *A Scots Quair* as inspired by Willa Muir's novel *Imagined Corners* (1931) in its engagement with formations of female identity.[21] But in 1930 in *Stained Radiance* Mitchell is already exploring a model of the divided female self which may owe something to classic configurations of self-recognition – the opening of *Great Expectations*, for example – but in its allusion to the body, and later in the same passage, to sexuality, demonstrates a complex understanding of the components of female subjectivity. This sophisticated awareness

of what it means to say 'I' echoes Virginia Woolf's explorations of the articulations of a gendered self two years earlier, in *Orlando* (1928) and *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Throughout *A Scots Quair* Gibbon's modeling of different selves for his central character, even when most famously translated into a conflict of Scots and English – 'two Chrisses there were that fought for her heart and tormented her' – has likewise been seen as particularly feminine.[22] In Mitchell's technically unsuccessful *Image and Superscription*, however, the central character Gershom Jezreel, an outsider because of his religious heritage and family background, is also shown as experiencing dislocating moments of self-recognition. He too looks at himself in the mirror and tries to assimilate his dark face and lighter features: 'Gershom had seen himself in a mirror on the stairs, the first full-length mirror he had seen for years, and had stopped on those stairs to stare at himself'.[23] If female subjectivity provides the author with the clearest delineation of clashes in identity formation, his understanding of it would appear to extend beyond patterning a gendered self.

It is, however, that complex representation of female identity which has produced both the most admiration and the greatest unease over Gibbon's work. In particular, his delineation of bodily consciousness through a female perspective has provoked criticism. Murray, while admiring *A Scots Quair*, questions unequivocally feminist readings of its heroine, mocking what she sees as potentially voyeuristic elements, aimed at titillation: 'I've often asked female students […] whether they have a recurrent need to retreat upstairs to a cold, wintry bedroom, there to undress and inspect themselves slowly in front of the mirror.'[24] Gibbon's interest in the motif of mirror-gazing as a means of negotiating female subjectivity, which Murray sees as indicative of a male perspective, is not confined to his 'Scottish' fiction. In *Three Go Back* Clair Stranlay is depicted early in the novel enjoying her physical self: '[s]he slipped out of wrap and pyjamas, rubbed her white and comely self until she felt warm and pringling and the possessor of an altogether enjoyable body'.[25] Yet even when turned primitive in the lost world of Atlantis, she is still shown admiring herself in a pool: 'It reflected her face and body as her feet touched the edge. She leant on her spear and looked down at herself. "Pretty thing still", she said, and rubbed her chill arms and flanks, still regarding herself.'[26] Such moments may be irritating, but their textual and sexual politics are complicated. First, while a present-centred reading may see such moments as reinforcing the male gaze as dominant – and similar criticisms have been levelled against Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar* (1995)[27] – in the context of the 1930s they arguably offer a frank

and challenging recognition that women can engage with their own sexual beings rather than only being subject to the male gaze. Compared to Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), banned for its representation of lesbianism yet curiously reticent in its depiction of any kind of female sexual self-awareness, or *Imagined Corners* by Gibbon's northeast compatriot Willa Muir, in which bodily consciousness is more decorously hinted at, Gibbon's representation contains a candour perhaps only possible in a male writer at the time. Certainly in his work as Mitchell there is a clear agenda to present women as inherently freer of false modesty and sexual repression, as Clair Stranlay's openness to a different kind of mating ritual, and Domina Riddoch's celebration of free love demonstrates.

Gay Hunter, one of Mitchell's more successful excursions into 'scientific romances', a genre inspired by H. G. Wells, offers some insight into gendered bodily awareness and its intersection with Gibbon's politics. Set in a world thousands of years after our own into which his eponymous heroine is catapulted, Mitchell again operates through a central female consciousness. Transported into a future in which the old hierarchies of shame and power have been destroyed and a new, innocent and free species of sub-people have emerged, Gay embraces the free and honest sexuality of her new world, despising the old models of shame and prurience; as with Clair in *Three Go Back*, she too finds fulfillment in a relationship with one of the new age hunters. Revealingly, Gay's own viewing of her body, initially similar to that of Chris in the *Quair* – and as irritatingly familiar in its apparent voyeurism – and to female characters in other novels, is transformed through her experiences in this new world into an articulation of authenticity. After initiating a relationship with the hunter Rem, Gay 'would stare at herself with secret wonder', feeling that in her 'all the starved and cheated women of all time who had mated in shame, inadequately, hemmed in by codes and taboos and shames' had found 'harbour' in the magic she experiences.[28] Before reaching this point she has had to move from an earlier self who delighted simply in looking at her own body – gazing in a pool, 'leaning forward so, the collar of her green dress that flapped forward to frame her head and face, prettily, she thought, though immodestly, for she could look down on the dress of her reflection to a gleam and shadow of shapely breasts' – and through a period in a physical and emotional wilderness in which a 'wild taggle-haired creature looked at her from this pool and that, with staring eyes and a strained, starved face, and she looked back now at the reflection with a vague interest […] to stare down at the mirrored self that had once

given her delight', to the moment of frank recognition.[29] In this trajectory of a developing female gaze, the novel moves from the fashioned appreciation of a clothed body, through annihilation of the body by a corrupt and self-destructive civilisation, and into a dynamic of the gaze in which self-appreciation can be unmediated. As Gay's fellow refugees from the twentieth century express their fascist inclinations by desiring to clothe what they see as the savages in grass kilts, female sexuality becomes in this new world the arena in which a wider politics of power are played out.[30] To read the author's fascination with women viewing their own bodies as voyeuristic is, in this context, to embody the sexual puritanism, repression and corruption that the novel is arguing against. An actively self-regarding sexuality becomes vital and political in this reimagining of modernity.

If this fascination with women viewing their bodies serves as a central trope for exploring alternative models of authenticity and sexual liberation, gender difference also offers alternative models of political engagement. Again there are distinctions between the fiction of Mitchell and Gibbon. Clair Stranlay, Domina Riddoch and Gay Hunter are all shown as prepared to take heroic action; Gay even initiates a march on London armed with spears. In the *Quair* the political paradigms are again more complicated: while women might offer an alternative perspective on the world, it is not necessarily one that is easy to enact. Reflecting on her first love and on the First World War, Chris muses:

> [Y]ou did this and that and you went down in hell to bring the fruit of your body to birth, it was nothing to the child that came from your womb, you gave to men the love of your heart, and they'd wring it dry to the last red drop, kind, dreadful and dear, and deep in their souls, whatever the pretence they played with you, they knew it a play and Life waiting outbye.[31]

The implication of (a potentially positive) marginality in the lives of women is reiterated when Chris spends a day walking with the younger woman, Cis, helping her with an all-too-familiar dilemma of heart and body by suggesting '*we're such fools – women, don't you think that we are now, Cis? To worry so much about men and their ploys, the things they do and the things they think?*'[32] Even in *Gay Hunter* there is a scene in which Gay is 'suddenly and waywardly desperate for companionship of her own gender', turning away from the making of male histories.[33] In *A Scots Quair* this tension becomes even more explicitly articulated, firstly in the difference between Chris and Robert, and later between herself and

her son, again ultimately expressed in a distance from systems of belief as when she says to Ewan that both his faith and that of Robert's is 'just another dark cloud to me'.[34]

This weighty investment in the representation of women as potentially outside history is, however, related to a second unease with Gibbon's fiction: the positioning of women as timeless, non-specific, representative figureheads. As Alison Lumsden astutely notes, the more critics claim the significant representation of female experience in the figure of Chris, the more anxieties they have to address about the stereotypical nature of that representation in its association of the feminine with nature, organicism and an apparent emphasis on passivity.[35] Yet, as critics such as Anderson and Lumsden have argued, Chris represents what might in itself be seen as a 'third way', a challenge to models of politics and history that operate with notions of 'linear time'.[36] Certainly her sense of herself as part of a larger landscape in which 'nothing endures' (echoed in *Gay Hunter*) is more than quiescence. Instead it may be translated into scepticism about conventional politics and a changing relationship to history; Lumsden's application of Kristeva's essay 'On Women's Time' to *A Scots Quair* proves convincing, particularly when understood in relation to Gibbon's more intellectual and less emotionally engaging fiction written under his own name. Chris, in this context, is less significant as a representative woman than in the challenge to political and chronological paradigms. The same could be said of Gay Hunter and Clair Stranlay. Even in *Image and Superscription*, where the central consciousness is masculine, the novel's dark message is most fully articulated by a female character, Ester Caldon: 'We're beasts, cruel beasts, worse than any other beasts, and that's all that the War is, you know. Sadism and cruelty, beasts tearing and stabbing in slime and blood …'[37] It is also Ester who critiques scientist and philosopher Ernst Haeckel, offering an alternative, more positive and Diffusionist reading to his evolutionary model: 'Beasts, yes, but once kindly beasts'.[38] Whether writing as Mitchell or as Gibbon, women figure for this author as a means of interrogating dominant modes of understanding both the past and possible futures.

In *A Scots Quair* national interpretations of the character of Chris Guthrie add an extra burden to this weight of investment in the feminine. While pointing out that the identification of Chris with the nation is explicitly made only twice in *A Scots Quair*, Kirsten Stirling asserts that the acceptance by readers and critics of 'Chris Caledonia' 'says as much about the need for a Scotland-as-woman figurehead in the [modern literary] Renaissance as it does about the intentions of the authors of the

period'.[39] The writings of Gunn and MacDiarmid attest to this. Yet to associate Chris Guthrie with Scotland need not necessarily invoke the familiar mythologising of woman as nation, as eternal and as of the earth. Chris serves as representative of Scotland's own complex history because of the challenge she presents to schematic political models and abstract systems of belief. When Robert tells her 'Oh *Chris Caledonia. I've married a nation!*', it is because she refuses to engage in romantic abstractions about what it is like to be pregnant; he asks: '*What does it feel like being as you are – a nuisance, just, or tremendous and terrible?*' and she replies that 'it made you feel sick, now and then'.[40] Her practical specificity, rather than simply a gendered characteristic, is translated here and at other points in the trilogy as a mode of resistance to belief systems:

> And you thought how long, long ago with Will, your brother, that time he came home from France, before he went back and was killed in France you'd said that Scots were never religious, had never BELIEVED as other folks did; and that was fell true, and not only for you.[41]

Scottishness, here imagined as a female practicality and reluctance to engage in abstraction, challenges metanarratives of time and history. Although Chris Guthrie may become part of an apparent timelessness in the last pages of *Grey Granite*, the broad sweep of the trilogy suggests this is a moment responding to and shaped by historical processes. The impulse to understand such processes may demand a return to the pre-historical and primitive, as Schreiner's *Woman and Labour* suggests and the fantasy fiction of Mitchell indicates, but is firm in its engagement with the present moment and its specifics. Dixon argues that Gibbon 'well knew there was no such thing as "the Scot", but Scottish rulers and ruled, masters and servants, bosses and workers'.[42] The figure through which he challenged national essentialism may have been glibly appropriated as national myth, but she serves in *A Scots Quair* to defeat such grand obliterations of difference.

The strength of female characterisation, the deployment of women as signifiers of political alternatives, and the articulation of a female voice in James Leslie Mitchell/Lewis Grassic Gibbon's fiction mark it as adventurous and experimental. He is not, however, alone in time or place in this respect: his work has to be situated alongside women writers who are not only contemporaneous but also writing from that same corner of Scotland: Nan Shepherd, Willa Muir and Lorna Moon all produced fiction which challenges the gender conventions of northeast

Scottish society, explores identity formation and experiments with new voices in both Scots and English. The relationship between these writers is difficult to configure. While, as discussed, Murray suggests that *A Scots Quair* could not have been written without the influence of Muir's *Imagined Corners*, particularly in its addressing of the idea of a split self, this was already a motif in Gibbon's writing.[43] Nan Shepherd's novel *The Quarry Wood* (1928) offers more striking parallels: in the character of Martha Ironside, growing up on a croft but desiring education and escape, the novel articulates a similar set of aspirations to Chris Guthrie but presents a different trajectory. By going to university, Martha moves – for a time – beyond the apparently limited world of the land, even if the novel's conclusion appears to advocate a more resigned return to her roots. Shepherd's later novel, *The Weatherhouse* (1930), like *A Scots Quair*, confronts the impact of the First World War, but is arguably more experimental than the trilogy in its multiplicity of narratives and range of interiorities.

Muir and Shepherd both moved in the literary circles of the modern Scottish Renaissance, so it is perhaps unsurprising that their experiments and interests overlapped with Gibbon's. Parallels with another woman writer from the northeast of Scotland are perhaps more tenuous but nevertheless striking. If Gibbon's linguistic technique can be convincingly read, as Lumsden suggests, as a model of *écriture féminine*, in which the use of Scots becomes 'a strategy to "haunt" the "smooth technique" of his narrative; to "shatter language" and "give voice to the unnameable" to borrow Kristeva's terms', it can also be aligned with techniques used by lesser-known novelist Lorna Moon, a native of Strichen, Aberdeenshire.[44] In her short stories, published as *Doorways in Drumorty* (1925), Helen Nora Wilson Low, growing up in Aberdeenshire but writing in the United States as Lorna Moon, set out to create a voice which would not be 'dialect' but would nevertheless 'use the idiom common to Scottish people'.[45] Moon's novel *Dark Star* (1929) moves from the intimate and domestic scenarios that form the basis of her short stories to a melodramatic narrative more suitable to her career as a Hollywood scriptwriter, but retains an interest in community and voices from all levels of northeastern society. Mitchell is consistently scathing of romantic fiction in his novels – in *Three Go Back*, for example, Clair Stranlay is savagely shaken out of the worldview formed by her career as a romantic novelist – so an appreciation of Lorna Moon might seem unlikely; but both writers share linguistic interests, as well as the experience of being repudiated by their respective communities for their depictions of them.

It is difficult to assess the extent to which Gibbon drew on these writers, but each, in their different ways and to various extents, challenged the literary conventions he despised. For these male and female novelists from the northeast of Scotland, as for other Modernists, 'an imaginary identification with the feminine emerged as a key stratagem in the literary avant-garde subversion of sexual and textual norms'.[46] However problematic feminist interpretations of Mitchell's and Gibbon's writing might be, that project to imagine a different world, a project with women at its centre, shapes all his fiction.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Gibbon, Shelley and Romantic Revolutionary Renewal

Ryan D. Shirey

In February 1935, a group of British writers and Kincardineshire farmers gathered in the snow beneath the Grampian hills at Arbuthnott Churchyard to inter the ashes of James Leslie Mitchell, who had at the time of his death only just begun to receive the critical accolades he aspired to for his work under the pen name of Lewis Grassic Gibbon.[1] Gibbon was a contemporary of W. H. Auden's, but was not of the 'Auden generation'. In his introduction to *Reading the Thirties* Bernard Bergonzi reads Gibbon as 'a Scottish Marxist who had some political affinities with [the "Auden generation"], but little else in common'.[2] Gibbon's early death, his unorthodox socialism, and, not least, his nationality, have meant that he has never fitted easily within categories of literary movements or generations. He remains a challenge to our desire to frame tidy literary-historical narratives around nationality, political beliefs or dates of birth.

Gibbon was, however, exceptional in another way. In an elegy occasioned by his funeral, Gibbon's friend, the poet Helen Cruickshank, speaks of the deceased in terms that anticipate the kind of revolutionary fervour that Gibbon hoped his work would inspire. In the final stanza of 'Spring in the Mearns: In Memoriam, Lewis Grassic Gibbon', Cruickshank writes,

> This man set the flame
> of his native genius
> under the cumbering whin
> of the untilled field;
> Lit a fire in the Mearns
> to illumine Scotland,
> clearing the sullen soil
> for a richer yield.[3]

The poet here captures the very feeling that Gibbon himself returned to time and again in his work – that it was the task of the writer to illumine the darkness of this benighted world and to dream of a vision of humanity fulfilled and whole. This perhaps is his most exceptional quality of all, and it is the basis for what Ian Bell has called Gibbon's 'Revolutionary Romanticism'.[4]

Cruickshank's tribute to Gibbon also speaks eloquently to the way that his life and works reflected a deep engagement with the literary practices of second generation Romantic writers such as Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats. Gibbon's persistent belief in a spiritual ideal uneasily attached to an imperfect material existence led him to a vision of his world that embraced a qualified Shelleyan 'sceptical idealism' and belief in the prophetic role of the artist, among other Romantic inheritances.[5] What Cruickshank observed was Gibbon's belief in the artist as fiery guiding beacon for a more humane future, a belief that was most self-consciously derived from Shelley. The epigraph to Book II of Gibbon's 1932 novel *Three Go Back*, written as Mitchell, for instance, illustrates his use of Shelley's language of inspiration: '*If I have been extinguished, yet there rise / A thousand beacons from the spark I bore*'.[6] These are lines from Shelley's incomplete final poem 'The Triumph of Life', and while they are spoken in that poem by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, it is clear in *Three Go Back* that Gibbon took these lines to heart as a powerful image of the possibility of spreading the spark of aesthetic and political inspiration. While his internationalist tendencies suggest that Gibbon himself might have wished to illumine more of the map than just Scotland, Cruickshank's tribute is a powerful summary of the core of Gibbon's belief in the visionary power of the writer and his own hopes for his writing as harbinger of social and political change.

Gibbon was born in 1901 and saw the destruction of rural village life in Scotland first-hand as an adolescent before and during the First World War. His own life experiences led Gibbon to the belief that faith in the machinery of society was grossly misplaced, that civilisation was merely another word for barbarism, and that the ultimate goal of humankind should be to escape – to borrow a phrase from Hugh Roberts's study of Shelley – the 'chaos of history'.[7] Turning his author's gaze on a world that seemed to him plagued with civilisation, Gibbon embraced the role of revolutionary writer and set about the task of exposing his readers to what he considered to be the most fundamental truths.

This enormous task was not, however, embarked upon without literary models. As William K. Malcolm notes, Gibbon's 'surviving library bears witness to a pervasive interest in those authors belonging to revolutionary, or at least innovatory, literary movements […] such as Shelley and the Romantics'.[8] Outside of the work of Malcolm, Ian Bell and Uwe Zagratzki,[9] Gibbon scholars have frequently remarked in passing upon, but rarely delved into, the degree to which the author's embrace of revolutionary writing derived from his understanding of Romanticism. While many other authors were important to Gibbon in different ways, it was the Romantics, and Shelley in particular, who afforded the author the greatest range of imaginative possibilities.

From the allusion to Shelley's *Adonais* in the title of his first novel, *Stained Radiance* (1930), to the Romantically inflected senses of landscape, history and futurity that emerge in the late non-fiction and *A Scots Quair* (1932–34), Gibbon continually makes reference to second-generation Romanticism as both aesthetic and political inspiration for the modern revolutionary writer. Embracing the second generation of Romantic poets, as well as their Victorian literary successors in William Morris, Algernon Charles Swinburne and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Gibbon asserted the value of an aesthetic that was itself a kind of political statement, rather than a kind of political writing that had aesthetic value. In other words, Gibbon believed that art did matter as a way of engaging critically with industrialised, modern society and disseminating the kind of revolutionary ideas that could call the people to, as Shelley wrote, 'Arise, arise, arise! / There is blood on the earth that denies ye bread!'[10] Like Shelley, however, Gibbon was himself torn between what Hugh Roberts terms the 'Romantic-idealist' and 'Enlightenment-sceptic' impulses in his work.[11]

The challenge of realising a hopeful vision for humanity's future, a vision derived from both the essential, incorruptible core of human life and the articulation of that essence in the work of writers such as Shelley, was a theme that Gibbon returned to on numerous occasions. In *Stained Radiance* Gibbon describes a complicated worldview in which the desire for the quasi-spiritual reawakening of an almost-Rousseauesque Natural Man – an idea again explored in *Three Go Back* – is matched and even refuted by the characters' and the author's recognition of the harsh realities of modern, industrial societies. At times that recognition could lead to cynicism and despair, as indeed it does in *Stained Radiance*, which John Lindsey describes as 'avowedly destructive […and] the cry of the

over-sensitive artist against the wrongs of the world'.[12] In other works, such as *The Lost Trumpet* (1932), *Spartacus* (1933) and *A Scots Quair*, the balance between hope and despair, idealism and scepticism, is preserved in such a way that the possibility of positive change endures.

In *Stained Radiance*, Gibbon, writing as J. Leslie Mitchell, undertakes the task of writing a semi-autobiographical exploration of the problems of artistic, political and social engagement in the modern world. The novelist, whom Gibbon himself later pointedly referred to as 'the Leslie Mitchell of 1928', was at this time a recently discharged airman whose professional prospects were grim and whose deep cynicism after his military experiences left him less than optimistic about the possibility of a better future either for himself or for the rest of humanity.[13] *Stained Radiance* is a somewhat bitter and ironic look at the bleak conditions of post-war London for a group of young people on the margins of social respectability who must make difficult, even seemingly impossible, decisions regarding their commitments to their own self-interests, their romantic relationships and their political beliefs.

While the novel is not an entirely successful effort in stylistic terms, it does anticipate many of the thematic concerns that would mark his later works. Malcolm describes the novel explicitly as a rehearsal of the author's primary literary concerns: 'The three major themes which [Gibbon] pursues in this novel are all familiar ones to his work in general, the author examining the role of the artist in modern society, and conducting a search for both political and philosophic truth'.[14] Even as *Stained Radiance* traces a narrative arc that could lead to its description as 'an orgy of destruction' in which, as Lindsey says, Gibbon's 'characters destroyed one another mercilessly – they destroyed God, society, sex', the novel also anticipates the author's more mature and optimistic work in an important way through its invocation of a Romantic predecessor to mediate between the despair of the real and the hope offered by the ideal.[15] This mediating process, though incomplete at this stage and marked by a rather selective and sometimes ironic reading of Shelley, was central to the way in which Gibbon could begin to imagine something more hopeful for humanity, even if that hope was derived from an obscure antiquity.

Stained Radiance has been labelled as negative, ironic and despairing, but it can also offer us insight into Gibbon's development of a literary philosophy that held out hope for the possibility of a revolution in both material and spiritual terms. As mentioned above, the title of the novel is taken from lines of Shelley's *Adonais*, which also serves as one of the

novel's epigraphs. Shelley's influence does not begin and end with this allusion, however, and as Gibbon takes on especially the first of the three themes Malcolm identifies, 'the role of the artist in modern society', he makes clear precisely how his own thoughts on that role have been shaped by his understanding of his Romantic predecessor.

The character through whom we see a specific, somewhat jaded reading of Romanticism is the Dutch expatriate poet Andreas van Koupa. Koupa is introduced to us as 'a poet and a tramp' whose adventures – the catalogue of which is exhausting – have been variously creative, criminal and political.[16] Koupa's wanderings seem almost more symbolic of the enormous disruption and dislocation caused by the war and the Russian Revolution than truly representative of one man's journeys. And yet the idea of such disoriented travel, of tramping from continent to continent and alternating between poles of creative and destructive endeavour, is actually a key concept for Gibbon's approach to the writer's role.

Koupa supports himself for years on the continent as a hack writer, pornographer and propagandist. He is filled with a sense of creative purpose but frustrated by the inability of his words to effect any meaningful change, so he decides to pursue literary success in England. He makes the acquaintance of the obtuse but wealthy political and artistic dilettante Mrs Gayford, who is enthralled with her new pet poet and gets him published in the literary magazines she patronises. Koupa begins to pass off his youthful verse as new work, and he convinces Mrs Gayford to found a new poetry magazine, *The Lyre* (pun surely intended), as he seduces her. Koupa trades on the image of the poet, and his successful efforts to woo his patroness are a direct result of her fascination with that romantic ideal. In fact Mrs Gayford imagines herself as '[t]he wife of the great poet. A second Mary Shelley'.[17]

The comparison is not apt, however, as Koupa will later acknowledge. The promise of a dedicated outlet for his poetry leads him to turn his back on his authentic political beliefs, however compromised they already were:

> And from these so-damned rebel meetings I've gathered rheumatism – the windy sentiments of half-baked Prometheans ablow on me. […] God mine, Art cries for security, for shelter. Have I not earned the so-little share of those now? […] Starving children and darkened brains, I have finished with you. Ergates [worker ants] you are the great Beast, the devouring sick Beast that eternally cries for aid and sustenance from I and the other fool Prometheans.[18]

It is with this interior monologue that Koupa finally abandons whatever remains of both his political and aesthetic commitments. He will sell the poems from his notebooks while acknowledging that all of the varied experiences that have informed his verse, particularly his exile wanderings, will never again be available to him after he settles into the middle-class domestic life that Mrs Gayford offers. With the rejection of Prometheanism, Koupa also explicitly rejects Shelley's idealised revolutionary hero, the Prometheus of *Prometheus Unbound*, and the idea of a politics that can be informed by creative endeavour, and vice versa. For the embittered ex-poet, 'Art cries for security' and not revolution.

As Koupa becomes more jaded by his bargain, he marvels at the way that his youthful poetry is being received, with reviewers celebrating the 'growing genius' that they see in what are randomly selected pieces from the poet's past.[19] Remarking upon the absurdity of this situation, Koupa negatively reasserts the association of a Shelleyan poetics with the idea of an integrated political and aesthetic commitment: 'It was well that I was of the Keatsian, not the Shelleyan genius. Had I expressed my so-brave rebel philosophy in terms political, even now it would be looked coldly upon.'[20] The claim for the explicitness of Shelley's political engagement once again demonstrates Gibbon's understanding of that poet's seminal role in the articulation of a visionary revolutionary perspective.

Surprisingly, Koupa gets the last word in the novel, despite his abandonment of his principles. Gibbon also makes it clear that, Koupa's negative qualities notwithstanding, there is still something of the visionary poet about him. Awakened in the middle of the night, Koupa stares out the window of his room over London before expanding his gaze to the sky and stars and experiencing an apocalyptic vision:

> A sudden fear, a desolation, held his soul. Not for the first time had he visioned the end of the world and of life, but never as he did on this night, in the stark silence. An awful loneliness horrified him … For *that* his days and nights. For that all the countless days and nights of humanity, the changings of the innumerable seasons, the burgeonings of the vernal Aprils, autumns with hands red from the winepress. For that the dream and the desire.
>
> Life! a misarrangement of the electrons, a phantasy against the still splendour of the eternal whorls …[21]

There are obvious hints of Keats's odes here, but the desolation of Koupa's vision, with its 'awful loneliness' and 'stark silence', its impersonal nature

whose cycles are undisturbed by the 'countless days and nights of humanity' and the toil that attends the seasons, is perhaps even closer to the ending of Shelley's 'Mont Blanc'. Nor is Koupa insensitive to the parallels of his vision with Shelley's when he invokes *Adonais*:

> He drew the curtains suddenly and blinded the room from that desolate splendour. Through his mind rang lines of Shelley, singing the wild vision of a dreamer dreaming beyond dreams and desires.
>
> > Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> > Stains the white radiance of eternity.
>
> *Stains the white radiance of eternity* … God mine, great Shelley! You at least have looked upon the winter skies, and seen …[22]

Koupa is terrified by his vision, and in connecting it to Shelley's he reads Shelley's response as terror as well, an understanding that 'scared that so-sweet soul'.[23] The conclusion Koupa reaches is to forget the vision and live to enjoy the comforts that surround him. He takes Shelley's fatal trip to Italy as an endorsement of his own resolution to revel in the pleasures of the material world, closes the book on his poetic career and resolves to impregnate his wife that very night.

Gibbon's own frustrations as a writer, including his difficulties in getting *Stained Radiance* published, certainly influenced his views in this novel as to what kinds of radical possibilities existed for a modern writer. However, within two years of its publication Gibbon was once again able to imagine the role of a revolutionary writer in terms both modern and explicitly Romantic. In *Three Go Back* (1932), three modern travellers on a zeppelin trip from Paris to New York survive the airship's destruction in an uncanny storm to find themselves washed ashore on the coast of prehistoric Atlantis. The three – Clair Stranlay, a writer of popular romance novels, Keith Sinclair, an American war veteran and leader of the League of Militant Pacifists, and Sir John Mullaghan, a cynical and plutocratic arms manufacturer – deduce their location geographically and temporally when they encounter a group of 'proto-Cro-Magnards' who speak a primitive form of Basque.[24] The moderns' encounter with these beautiful golden people, who roam naked over the Atlantean plains without leaders, religion or property, leads them to confront their long-held assumptions about human nature and history.

Once it becomes clear to the time-travellers that they are witnesses to a forgotten age in which humans were not apes or superstitious savages, but true Natural Men who lived harmoniously with nature and one another, they must reconcile this experience with their ideas of modern civilisation. The only modern cultural context the travellers have for understanding the Golden Age is the poetry that springs to mind at various moments of insight into this strange ancient world. The most important poetic statement in the novel is connected with the epiphany of Sir John Mullaghan, who, at the beginning of the novel, argues incessantly with his companions about the bestial violence at the core of human nature. Having observed the functional proto-communism of the golden hunters, Sir John is confronted with the terrible realisation that his beliefs about humanity have been utterly mistaken. Suffering from the strain of the group's adventures, food poisoning, and the psychological fallout from realising his share of blame in the brutality of modern life, he searches for a way to derive some meaning from what he has seen:

> Perhaps men dreamt the wrong dream. We are such stuff of dreams … Perhaps it was only a nightmare astray on Sinclair's time-spirals out of which we came … It feels so here this morning. As though all the world could begin again –
>
> Begin again? […] Begin again? Poets had dreamt it, and they had changed the world with other dreams … Shelley, of course! Long since he had read Shelley:
>
> *'The world's great age begins anew,*
> *The golden years return.*
> *The earth doth like a snake renew*
> *Her winter skin outworn:*
> *Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam*
> *Like wrecks of a dissolving dream.'* [25]

The powerful possibility of renewal, of the world beginning again, is framed by Sir John's memory of Shelley's poetry. These lines, the first stanza of *Hellas*, are the old man's way of synthesising his newfound knowledge of the Golden Age with the poetic insight of a modern writer in a poem that concludes with a plea that makes Sir John's memory of it all the more poignant:

O cease! must hate and death return?
Cease! must men kill and die?
Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn
Of bitter prophecy!
The world is weary of the past –
O might it die or rest at last![26]

As the repentant capitalist's condition worsens, he falls into a delirium from which he begins to address an imaginary session of Parliament regarding the error of his and their ways.

While it is clear that he will not live to see the opportunity to reprove his peers, his ardour inspires Clair to her own imagined address to the future.

> In an unimpassioned clarity her mind went on with that speech, as though she also were addressing an unborn multitude in that future from which she had come, and which she would never see again … *No Record?* Except that […] each and all of them sleeping here in this wild night, were to live through the ages, to pass undying through them, to rise again in the Christs and Father Damiens, the Brunos and the Shelleys, the comradeship and compassion of the slave-pit and the trench. No record! They were to live though all else died; they were ghosts of a sanity that haunted mankind.[27]

As Clair recognises the persistence of the Golden Age Natural Man in the figure of someone like Shelley, she also slowly comes to comprehend that the potential for the realisation of that fully integrated humanity exists in every person. This belief is literalised at the end of the novel when Clair and Sinclair, having returned to their own time after being 'killed' during a vicious Neanderthal attack on the Cro-Magnards, recognise in each other the essence of the hunters they had come to know and love in the Golden Age.

The end of the novel is hopeful, as Clair implores Sinclair to hold on to their dreams for a society free from the taint of civilisation: 'Remember that world you planned beyond the southern mountains? It's still a possible world and a possible civilisation.'[28] Recognising the enormity of their task and the unlikelihood of their being taken seriously by those who remain adherents of modern civilisation, Clair and Sinclair nevertheless determine to carry out Sir John's last wish. As he neared death, the

reformed war profiteer urges his companions to change the course of the future:

> 'You *must* get back. They're planning it again. … Tell them, Sinclair. Fight them even with your bombs if they won't listen. … They *shall* listen. For there was hope even in that age out of which we came – more hope than ever before since civilisation began. Else we could never have dreamt this dream, we three who are its children. The slaver and the soldier passes and Man will walk the earth again …'[29]

This message of desperation and hope is once again framed in Shelley's terms: '[Sir John] began to speak in a low, singing voice, so low that Clair had to bend nearer to hear him', at which point the old man repeats the first stanza from *Hellas*, this time as an audible punctuation to the missionary charge he lays upon Sinclair.[30] Revolution here becomes a way of returning to a sort of innocent existence; the imagination of a utopian future, 'the possible world' and 'possible civilisation' that Clair implores Sinclair to work to create, can only happen if one, at least conceptually, returns to the past.

The persistence of a submerged consciousness, at once positively atavistic and profoundly humanist, which plays such a central role in *Three Go Back*, is in many ways a hallmark of Gibbon's work. In his 1933 novel *Spartacus*, for example, the titular leader of the famous Roman slave revolt is described as both a throwback to the Golden Age of human history and as a proto-Christ figure whose martyrdom to the cause of slave emancipation anticipated what Gibbon saw as the true revolutionary message of the historical Jesus.

> [T]he further tale […] had spread: that the Thracian savage who led the slaves was himself no Thracian, but a tribesman of remoter people, strayed southwards and captured from the Golden Age. […] And [Kleon] saw before him, gigantic, filling the sky, a great Cross with a figure that was crowned with thorns; and behind it, sky-towering as well, gladius in hand, his hand on the edge of the morning behind that Cross, the figure of a Gladiator. And he saw that these Two were One, and the world yet theirs: and he went into unending night and left them that shining earth.[31]

Just as he had established a prophetic-revolutionary line of descent, from proto-Cro-Magnard to his modern protagonists in *Three Go Back*, Gibbon here further establishes the connection between the Golden Age's innocent

state of fully realised humanity and the possibility of a 'shining earth' ushered in by those heroic figures who somehow have maintained a connection with that pre-civilisation principle of selfless individualism or anarchistic communism. This representation of Spartacus as Christ-like suffering saviour and revolutionary icon is again reminiscent of Shelley's similar use of Prometheus as a salvific figure who belongs to the Classical Age and yet anticipates the revolutionary power not only of action, but also of words. Daniel Hughes has suggested that, for Shelley, Prometheus is the embodiment of the 'capable poet', whose suffering itself becomes translated into purposeful, potentially liberating language; as Hughes puts it, '[w]hat we experience in Act One of *Prometheus Unbound* is the emergence of a creative possibility, embodied in Prometheus and enacted as we read'.[32]

Gibbon signals a similar reading of Spartacus in the self-consciously Romantic poem with which he begins *Spartacus*. This poem, itself titled 'Spartacus', begins by invoking the titular character with lines that evoke Shelley's use of apostrophe: 'O thou who lived for Freedom when the Night / Had hardly yet begun'.[33] Gibbon proceeds to describe Spartacus's legacy as sustained in explicitly linguistic terms: 'Through the blind drift of days and ways forgot / Thy name, thy purpose: these have faded not!'[34] In the face of constant change, the seeming passivity of a torturous (non) death – whether the saviour figure is chained to a rock or hung upon a cross – becomes, curiously, a constant and a rallying cry for revolution. In the second stanza of the poem, a sestet of rhymed couplets, Gibbon writes:

> Sport of the winds, O ashes of the Strong!
> But down the aeons roars the helots' song
> Calling to battle. Long as on the shore
> The washing tides shall crumble cliff and nore
> Remembered shalt thou be who dauntless gave
> Unto the world the lordship of the slave![35]

In other words, Spartacus triumphs in creating an idea, transmitted through word and song, that lives on and inspires, in spite of the ultimate failure of the historical slave rebellion. He is, as Hughes writes of Shelley's Prometheus, 'a structure of words raised to the mythic and the transformative'.[36] The elevation of Spartacus to this mythic status is precisely what allows Gibbon to connect him in the novel with the pre-civilisational Golden Age and to represent him as an avatar of the Natural Man.

However, the persistence of the past in Gibbon's fiction is not always figured in this way. Something of *Stained Radiance*'s ironic bitterness, a cynical sense of the possible futility of human action, stays with Gibbon and mingles with his idealism in many of his most accomplished pieces of fiction. The simultaneous contemporaneity and irretrievability of the past becomes even more important in Gibbon's 'Scottish' fiction, such as his most well-known and critically regarded work *A Scots Quair*, comprising *Sunset Song* (1932), *Cloud Howe* (1933) and *Grey Granite* (1934). The novels trace the life of Chris Guthrie from her youth in a rural northeast village through the events of the Great War, industrialisation and urbanisation, and finally, with *Grey Granite*, to the labour struggles of the 1920s and 1930s and a depiction of urban Scotland at the time of the novel's publication. With each novel, the vestiges of rural life are swept further away as Chris moves to increasingly larger communities and finally to the fictional modern city of Duncairn.

In each novel there is a palpable sense of historical movement, of the increasing pace of modern industrialisation confronting something that remains of a pre-industrial and agriculturally oriented society, but never is this confrontation more powerful or affecting than in *Sunset Song*. In addition to being arguably the most finely crafted of his novels, *Sunset Song* reveals Gibbon's abiding Romantic attachment to his native landscape, which contrasts with his awareness of what, in 'The Land', he would call 'the ancient, strange whirlimagig of the generations that enslaved the Scots peasantry for centuries': agricultural society.[37] Yet it is the cultivation of land that in that same essay would, in a cosmic apotheosis, become the crowning achievement of human existence:

> This is our power, this the wonder of humankind, our one great victory over nature and time. Three million years hence our descendants out on some tremendous furrowing of the Galaxy, with the Great Bear yoked to The Plough and the wastes of space their fields, will remember this little planet, if at all, for the men who conquered the land and wrung sustenance from it by stealth and shrewdness and a savage and surly endurance. Nothing else at all may endure in those overhuman memories: I do not think there is anything else I want to endure.[38]

The same land that 'enslaved' a peasant underclass is also the only human endeavour that Gibbon imagines as worthy of lasting.

The incredible tension in his work – the love-hate relationship with which he views the past and the landscape in which that past is embedded

– is in itself a singularly important part of the power Gibbon's 'Scottish' novels possess. *Sunset Song*, in particular, continuously explores the ways in which the past continues, both literally and figuratively, to haunt the present. Near the novel's end, Chris becomes engaged to the new minister, a socialist war veteran named Robert Colquohoun. Reverend Colquohoun is not, however, merely a representative of his own generation's war experience and political sensibility; he is also, according to Kinraddie gossip, the son of an older minister who had previously tried for the Kirk position in the village and had 'preached about beasts and the Golden Age, that the dragons still lived but sometime they'd die and the Golden Age come back'.[39] The younger Colquohoun causes quite a stir himself as he 'whistled when he went on a Sunday walk and he stormed at farmers for the pay they paid and he helped the ploughmen's Union; and he'd preach just rank sedition about it, and speak as though Christ had meant Kinraddie'.[40] Both Colquohoun ministers meet with resistance in the community for preaching a revolutionary renewal that comes with the return of a past that would make 'folk […] grow fair uncomfortable', whether that be a prehistoric Golden Age or the Second Coming.[41] The older Colquohoun couches his criticisms of the modern world in mythic terms, as the dragons that still live to torment the land, but his son favours direct political action in the community.

For a novel that begins with the mythical founding of Kinraddie at a time 'when gryphons and such-like beasts still roamed the Scots countryside' and at a place where a Norman knight slays one such griffin, the return of a mythic beast narrative signals yet another way in which cyclical time is at work.[42] The Shelleyan notion of the renewal of the age that we see in *Hellas* emerges again in Gibbon's work as the young Robert Colquohoun attempts symbolically to slay the 'beasts' that have most recently preyed upon the community. This effort will itself become complicated by Robert's death at the pulpit in *Cloud Howe*, but his visionary capacity to see a 'greater hope and a newer world' is quite clearly, in *Sunset Song*, derived from the same Shelleyan sceptical idealism that informed Gibbon's early work.[43]

At the conclusion of *Sunset Song*, the minister delivers a moving, elegiac homily about the village war dead at the dedication ceremony for Kinraddie's war memorial – an inscription on one of the Blawearie standing stones. The decimation of this generation of men becomes emblematic of the disappearance of an entire type and class of men; Colquohoun laments, '[*w*]*ith them we may say there died a thing older than themselves, these were the Last of the Peasants, the last of the Old*

Scots folk'.[44] Tellingly, the novel's prelude, 'The Unfurrowed Field', is an encapsulated history of the village, providing the historical narrative that ends with the minister's remarks in an epilude that shares the same title. Yet the circularity of the return to an unfurrowed field that holds at least the possibility of reinitiating the cycle of 'Ploughing', 'Drilling', 'Seed-Time' and 'Harvest', the titles of the other chapters, suggests that the history of the community has not ended so much as it lies fallow in the wake of the massive and violent social disruption of the war.

The homily itself is apocalyptic in tone, from its title, 'FOR I WILL GIVE YOU THE MORNING STAR', taken from Revelations 2. 28, to the overt political content Colquohoun uses to try to rally his flock:

> *So, lest we shame them, let us believe that the new oppressions and foolish greeds are no more than mists that pass. They died for a world that is past, these men, but they did not die for this that we seem to inherit. Beyond it and us there shines a greater hope and a newer world, undreamt when these four died. But need we doubt which side the battle they would range themselves did they live to-day, need we doubt the answer they cry to us even now, the four of them, from the places of the sunset?*[45]

It is also, however, a deeply Romantic message that the minister is sharing in the shadow of both these ancient stones and the grief caused by the war.

In a contentious essay of 1963, David Craig described the language of the homily in terms designed to chastise what he saw as Gibbon's narrowly national perspective; however, he did recognise the undercurrent of Romanticism that charges Colquohoun's speech:

> National feelings breathe and surge in such a passage, and the vocabulary that comes naturally to express them is the old Romantic language – sunsets and stars, 'nothing abides', the darkness. The associations the Romantic poets had played on to express their melancholy at what seems now to have been their fundamental underlying subject – the spoliation of the old craftsmen's and yeomen's England – are equally apt for Gibbon. He invokes them shamelessly, with no inhibition, so overweening are his national fellow-feeling, grief, and nostalgia.[46]

Despite the dismissiveness with which Craig treats both Gibbon and the English Romantic poets, his observation is not altogether wrong, although it must be qualified. The Romantic source that seems most likely for

Gibbon to have drawn upon was itself a visionary pastoral elegy that recurred as an inspiration in his work: Shelley's *Adonais*. This poem is not a nostalgic take on the passing of the old 'yeomen's England', and its melancholy stems from the poignancy of real grief for John Keats, who died, like Ewan Tavendale, Chris's first husband, all too young. The invocation of the biblical verse's 'morning star' is also a nod to the 'Preface' of *Adonais*, in which Shelley's first words are a Greek epigraph from a poem attributed to Plato. In Shelley's own translation, the lines read: 'Thou wert the morning star among the living, / Ere thy fair light had fled; / Now, having died, thou art as Hesperus, giving / New splendour to the dead.'[47]

As the day goes down to darkness and Colquohoun imagines the dead men's voices crying 'from the places of the sunset', a piper plays 'The Flowers of the Forest' and Chris and Robert stand on a darkening hill in a moment when they realise 'you can do without the day if you've a lamp quiet-lighted and kind in your heart'.[48] While the image is in some sense cosy and domestic, it also follows the political exhortation of the minister and a communal outpouring of grief over the dead. We may see here echoes again of the Shelley of 'The Triumph of Life', or this from the closing lines of *Adonais*:

> I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar!
> Whilst, burning through the inmost veil of heaven,
> The soul of Adonais, like a star,
> Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.[49]

With death comes the possibility of a rekindled spark that lights a beacon to the Eternal. Gibbon's formulation of this idea may not be as grandiose as Shelley's, but his ongoing fascination with this image again suggests a clear debt to Romanticism that had more to do with a sense of Promethean revolutionary possibility than nationalistic nostalgia. This is also, in a way, Gibbon passionately declaring his belief in the necessity of change and the possibilities that radical change can represent. In the 1816 poem 'Mutability', Shelley writes:

> It is the same! – For, be it joy or sorrow,
> The path of its departure still is free;
> Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow;
> Nought may endure but Mutability.[50]

Gibbon echoes that final sentiment in Robert's statement that '[*n*]*othing, it has been said, is true but change*'.[51] This message, in a more sceptical form, also concludes *Grey Granite*, as a middle-aged Chris reflects that 'that was the best deliverance of all […] that that Change who ruled the earth and the sky and the waters underneath the earth […] might be stayed by none of the dreams of men, love, hate, compassion, anger or pity, gods or devils or wild crying to the sky. He passed and repassed in the ways of the wind, Deliverer, Destroyer and Friend in one'.[52]

The disruptive changes that are commemorated and lamented in *Sunset Song* and throughout the course of *A Scots Quair* become more ideological than physical and it is clear that Gibbon struggles at times to reconcile a belief in real political progress with the suspicion that all human actions are as transitory and insubstantial to the fundamental fixity of the natural world as the ideological clouds over Segget in *Cloud Howe*. Nature could be for Gibbon, as it was for Shelley, impersonal and sometimes frighteningly distant – an inaccessible power. The land could be a place from which you clawed a desperate and meagre living. Human actions could seem futile and inconsequential. However, the hope for a visionary return to the harmonious Golden Age, which Gibbon believed could inspire a kind of revolution consistent with, but different from, the one Ewan is planning in the streets of Duncairn in *Grey Granite*, is also a fantasy of surrender to that vast and *mercifully* inhuman power of nature and its cycles of renewal. The poetic and philosophical inheritances of Romanticism, especially in its Shelleyan variety, were the wellspring from which Gibbon drew an understanding of that power as a politically revolutionary force and a potential source for human renewal.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Scottish Nationalism

Christopher Silver

The relationship between Lewis Grassic Gibbon and the nascent, fragmented Scottish nationalism of his day was dismissive, hostile and defined largely by the author's political, intellectual and geographic distance from it.[1] On completing *Scottish Scene, or The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn* (1934), co-authored with Hugh MacDiarmid, Gibbon predicted that that the volume would be 'a scream in at least one respect', writing of the poet MacDiarmid: 'He is the extreme Nationalist; I characterise the Nationalists as "brosy barbarians". And so on – God knows what Grieve will say when he sees my sections!'[2] Though it has only been deemed worthy of two revivals (c.1940 and 1974), *Scottish Scene* was first published at a key point in Gibbon's short career. Prior to introducing his pseudonymous 'distant cousin' to the Scottish literary scene, James Leslie Mitchell had been largely absent from Scotland for a decade, undertaking military service in England and the Middle East, before settling in Hertfordshire.[3] In further contrast to MacDiarmid, his only foray into Scottish politics that we know of occurred while still a teenager in the form of brief involvement with revolutionary socialists in Aberdeen and Glasgow.[4] In a basic sense, the 'brosy barbarians' of early Scottish nationalism were Gibbon's political enemies as expressed through aggressive polemic in his *Scottish Scene* essays.

Gibbon also lampooned nationalism in his fiction. *A Scots Quair* (1932–34) is notable, particularly after the first novel in the trilogy, *Sunset Song*, for engaging with contemporary political events, and it is in the last of the three novels, *Grey Granite*, as part of a polyphonic attempt to portray an authentic Scottish city, that the presence of Scottish nationalism is addressed. The picture is not flattering. A thinly disguised caricature of MacDiarmid, 'Hugo MacDownall, the chap who wrote in Synthetic Scots', is standing in a university rectorial election, yet his student supporter

sees the candidacy as a source of high-jinks rather than political inspiration.[5] For Chris, the central protagonist of the *Quair*,

> Nationalism was just another plan of the Tories to do down the common folk. Only this time 'twas to be done in kilts and hose, with bagpipes playing and a blether about Wallace, the English to be chased across the Border and the Scots to live on brose and baps.[6]

With its montage-like technique, *Grey Granite* presents nationalism as just one distraction amongst a multitude of ideologies espoused by the eccentric inhabitants of the boarding house on which the novel is centered. That the author is equally critical of the competitors – a venal Labour Party, a hypocritical Kirk, a propagandist press, Douglasite economics, and Fabian socialism – can hardly be said to further the case for appropriating *A Scots Quair* as a nationalist text.

Writing several decades after Gibbon's death, MacDiarmid was vague about his collaborator's ideological position: 'He had at first little sympathy with the project of a Scottish Renaissance Movement but he came round. In politics too he gravitated to Communism and became an out-and-out Republican.'[7] Here, the term 'Republican' suggests that MacDiarmid is seeking to associate the author with his own political development, specifically a project led by the poet in the 1930s to reconcile communism and nationalism, with the ideas of the political agitator John Maclean cast as the missing link.[8] Gibbon, as is discussed in Uwe Zagratzki's chapter in this volume, was essentially a libertarian-communist, though this did not extend to membership of the Communist Party itself.[9] However much MacDiarmid might have wished it, there was no cohesive left-wing case for Scottish nationalism presented in this period, though he was to immediately grasp the significance of Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* when exposed to Hamish Henderson's translation in 1949.[10] Prior to that, it is difficult to discern how revolutionary socialism would have managed to sit alongside a Scottish nationalist agenda, something that MacDiarmid's troubled career in the 1930s and 1940s is testament to. Yet Gibbon's dismissal of nationalism was not absolute. In a letter to Neil M. Gunn written a few months before Gibbon's death, he attempts to persuade the nationalist Gunn to contribute to the *Voice of Scotland* series he was editing: 'I'm not really anti-Nationalist. But I loathe Fascism and all the other dirty things that hide under the name. I doubt if you can ever have Nationalism without Communism.'[11] Whether this does signal some kind of softening towards a left-nationalist stance as

MacDiarmid implies is hard to verify. What we can say with some certainty is that Gibbon's view of Scottish history and his willingness to engage with other Scottish writers on Scottish themes was bound to have developed had he lived. Gibbon's contribution to *Voice of Scotland* was to have been a book on William Wallace, who in 'The Antique Scene' is cast as a proto-revolutionary, the one notable character in Scottish history that he found fit for broader consideration. He was also planning a large-scale novel on the Covenanters at the time of his death.[12]

Gibbon's view of both world and Scottish history is of some significance to this discussion, as is his constant awareness of an impending global confrontation between fascism and communism. His outlook on this front was bleak: towards the end of *Grey Granite*, Ewan suggests that of all the competing ideological variations within capitalism, fascism will outlast the lot.[13] Whatever nuances may have developed within the movement for Scottish independence, or in Gibbon's apparent shift towards a greater interest in Scotland near the end of his life, for this 'jingo patriot of planet earth' nationalism was an anachronism.[14] That said, to simply disregard the author's scathing engagement with the Scottish question would do a disservice to the manner in which his work prefigures debate around Scottish independence in the second half of the twentieth century. To explore this theme properly, it is first necessary to outline the shape of the early Scottish national movement that Gibbon would encounter and confront, while acknowledging that by the time of his death in 1935 Scottish nationalism was in no sense an effective political force.

Was there a Scottish nationalism?

> Scotland is unique among European nations in its failure to develop a nationalist sentiment strong enough to be a vital factor in its affairs – a failure inconsistent with our traditional love of country and reputation for practicality. […] For it must be recognised that the absence of Scottish nationalism is, paradoxically enough, a form of Scottish self-determination.[15]

As this quotation from MacDiarmid's *Albyn* reminds us, there is an inherent complexity in any account of Scottish nationalism, a fact that even those unambiguously seeking to propagate it acknowledge. While MacDiarmid was eager to fuse his literary and political objectives for Scotland, he did so with a keen sense of the ambiguous inheritance he

had to work with on both fronts. Thus the space for literary innovation and the national renewal of Scotland existed only once a new paradigm was invoked. While Welsh nationalism in the 1930s was programmatically internationalist and European – proposing, for example, a council of small nations under the aegis of the League of Nations – Ireland and other small European nations tended to follow nineteenth-century romantic models. Scotland's position in history and, it could be said, independence of mind, demanded a distinct set of responses outwith such constraints.

Such nuance seems to have been lost on many of the earliest exponents of Scottish nationalism, a loose coalition of eccentric intellectuals with a remarkably broad range of political backgrounds. Though they would contest elections in the late 1920s and early 1930s, this group of outriders was more akin to a pressure group than a political party. While the Scottish Home Rule Association dated back to the 1880s, its post-war reincarnation quickly became dominated by an increasingly successful Labour Party. With the formation of the first Labour minority administration in 1923, the party's traditional emphasis on Home Rule quickly eroded as it sought to shore up its success at Westminster. These developments led to the emergence of a variety of nationalist groupings that eventually resulted in the formation of the National Party of Scotland (NPS) in 1928.[16]

With no mass cultural-linguistic movement for ballast, it is perhaps unsurprising that the NPS, even after its merger with the more conservative Scottish Party to form the Scottish National Party in 1934, was not successful at the ballot box. This was exacerbated due to the inevitable lack of a cohesive political platform for an organisation that sought to balance the demands of revolutionary socialists and the conservative Duke of Montrose. What is illuminating with regard to Gibbon's objection to nationalist politics is the amount of emphasis that is put on Scottish history, race, language and culture by prominent nationalists at this time. The journalist, anthropologist and poet Lewis Spence, whom Gibbon described in his essay 'Literary Lights' as the only poet other than MacDiarmid worthy of note in Scotland, is an instructive case.[17] Spence's manifesto for the Scottish National Movement (a precursor to the NPS) penned in 1927, devotes around half of its contents to Scottish history before the nineteenth century, with a pitch that is explicitly romantic-nationalist:

> Scotsmen and Scotswomen, I dedicate this booklet to you, not so much in the hope that it will appeal to your minds as to your hearts, for it is

> your hearts that I wish to reach. […] I know well that the sentiments you have inherited from your ancestors have not been forgotten, and now I implore you to put on the whole armour of Scottish steadfastness and raise your heads among the nations once more. The alternative is to perish. For I know that by sentiments we Scots live and die.[18]

Spence was also a candidate for the NPS in the Midlothian and Peebles by-election of 1929. His campaigning activities included a lengthy speech on Robert Burns in Middle Scots, an approach presumably built on the premise that the electorate was, in Spence's words, 'ripely in favour of Scottish national freedom and self-expression and that it remains only to stir your feelings to make these possible'.[19] As it transpired, the constituency was not stirred and Spence was to walk away with only 4.5% of the vote.[20] It is not difficult to see how the *völkisch* enthusiasms of such figures presented easy targets for Gibbon's satire. In *Grey Granite*, the comic figure of the unionist spinster Miss Murgatroyd encourages the sceptical Ewan to read a book by Lewis Spence 'all about the ancient Scots, they'd been Awful Powerful in magic. And Ewan said that was nice; and he was sure they had'.[21] But bigger contradictions could easily be identified in the nascent nationalist movement. Perhaps because of the lack of a folk-nationalist movement, early nationalism seems inherently compromised, a 'lash-up' springing from a pragmatic desire for Home Rule on the one hand, while, on the other, seeking to inculcate a far broader revival of national life, language and culture.[22] As Murray Pittock has pointed out, given the acute sense of national economic decline, that Scottish nationalism would emerge in this period is not surprising; rather, what is noteworthy is its failure to become an effective political force against such a backdrop.[23]

Race, Modernism and nationalism

Mapping the links between literary Modernism and politics is always problematic: there are arguably few writers from the period whose political views would fit with any mainstream political formation in our own time. In retrospect, it is as easy to defame MacDiarmid for his expressions of affinity with overtly fascist writers such as Ezra Pound or Wyndham Lewis, as it is to berate Gibbon for his offhand remark in 'The Land' that Stalinism offered collectivised peasants 'compensation'.[24] However, the influence in a specifically Scottish cultural setting of George Malcolm Thomson's racialist tract *Caledonia* was pervasive. Its powerful rhetoric

and bleak prognosis – that Scotland would quite literally cease to have any distinctive status by the early twenty-first century – was an unavoidable provocation. MacDiarmid's *Albyn* was advertised as a response to it and Gibbon would dedicate *Cloud Howe* (1933) to Thomson, who was also a widely respected publisher. Scottish nationalism from Thomson's viewpoint is not a project of Modernist-revolutionary renewal; rather it is a rearguard action for the preservation of a Scottish 'race' on the verge of extinction:

> The first fact about the Scot is that he is a man eclipsed. The Scots are a dying people. They are being replaced in their own country by a people alien in race, temperament and religion, at a speed which is without parallel in history outside the era of barbarian invasions. Certainly there is nothing in modern times to compare with the ousting of one population by another which has been taking place in Scotland during the last sixty or seventy years and which is going on with undiminished momentum at the present time.[25]

That the Scottish question, in this era, was often associated with an altogether darker 'Irish question' is of some significance. Arguably, given the Kirk's complicity in promoting such sectarianism, as in its 1923 report *The Menace of the Irish Race to our Scottish Nationality*, these views would have carried mainstream appeal within Scottish society, offering a bridge to nationalist exhortations that Scotland needed Home Rule in order to solve such distinctive problems. Arguments against Irish immigration and slum housing often figuratively merge into one: 'Half-Scotland is slum poisoned', writes Thomson, and '[t]he taint of the slum is in the nation's blood; its taint in their minds has given birth to a new race of barbarians'.[26]

Such language all too easily allows negative characterisations of slum-dwellers themselves to seep into condemnation of Scotland's appalling housing conditions in the early part of the twentieth century. Gibbon, the militant cosmopolitan, could revert to ethnic categories and stereotypes too. In 'Glasgow', an essay fixated on the author's visceral horror at the city's slums, a similar propensity to identify and 'other' the inhabitant in line with their living conditions can be discerned: 'The hundred and fifty thousand eat and sleep and copulate and conceive and crawl into childhood in those waste jungles of stench and disease and hopelessness, sub-humans as definitely as the Morlocks of Wells'.[27] Gibbon goes on to pull back from such hysteria to emphasise that this is *human* suffering

after all. But the entire premise of 'Glasgow' is the city's monstrous otherness, almost too terrible for his own pen to describe: 'no Scottish image of personification may display, even distortedly, the essential Glasgow. One might go further afield, to the tortured imaginings of the Asiatic mind, to find her likeness'.[28] The savage prose of this essay expresses the perceived barbarity of urban capitalist modernity and eviscerates small nation nationalism in particular, in large part because, like the other ideological camps parodied, it does not offer the 'surgery' that is required to cleanse the Glasgow slums.[29] While Gibbon is dismissive of an array of factions within Scottish politics, much of his scorn is reserved for nationalism. Within his assessment that small nations are 'a curse to the earth' he displays a particularly visceral disdain for post-treaty Ireland:

> Of all the accursed progeny of World War, surely the worst was this dwarf mongrel-litter. The South Irish of the middle class were never pleasant persons: since they obtained their Free State the belch of their pride in the accents of their unhygienic patois has given the unfortunate Irish Channel the seeming of a cess-pool.[30]

Such explicitly anti-Irish racist remarks, feeding directly off caricatures of Irish people in the national press, as in journals like *Punch*, are perhaps all the more sinister to our post-Holocaust generation of readers to which terms such as 'mongrel' and 'unhygienic' seem to evoke the worst crimes of twentieth-century totalitarianism. They also demonstrate a significant part of Gibbon's rationale for opposing Scottish nationalism, which, as Keith Dixon has argued, related to the author's marked distaste for the pan-Celtic revivalism that was championed by Scottish nationalists such as Ruaraidh Erskine of Marr and which held up Ireland as a fraternal model for Scotland.[31] Indeed, the most irreconcilable of the many contradictions of early Scottish nationalism is that it took impetus from both anti-Irish bigotry *and* the creation of the Irish Free State.

The significance of race to both nationalist and non-nationalist writers of this period should not be underestimated. When, for example, Gibbon off-handedly jests, 'I like the thought of the Scottish Fascists evicting all those of Irish blood from Scotland, and so leaving Albyn entirely deserted but for some half-dozen pro-Irish Picts like myself' he is, inadvertently, revealing the salience and credibility that ethnic theorising maintained.[32] This, as Gerard Carruthers has observed, is just one example to be found in a number of places throughout Gibbon's writing which asserts that his own Mearns 'peasant stock' is significant in being the remnant

of what he took to be, in line with the historiography of the time, a pre-Celtic Pictish people.[33] 'The Antique Scene' provides one such archaic outline of Scottish history. The virtuous Pictish stock is diluted by Norsemen, Angles and, most damningly of all, enslaved by the Celt: 'the Kelts are a strain quite alien to the indubitable and original Scots. They were, and remain, one of the greatest curses of the Scottish scene, quick, avaricious, unintelligent, quarrelsome, cultureless, and uncivilisable.'[34] If Gibbon's attempt to kick back against the Celticism of his contemporaries with an alternative picture of Scotland's ethnic origins seems like a regressive exercise, it should also be viewed in the context of anglophone literary Modernism's interest in race.

In the 1920s and 1930s, pseudo-scientific race-based movements such as eugenics gained considerable traction in literary circles. D. H. Lawrence, H. G. Wells, Bernard Shaw, Virginia Woolf and W. B. Yeats, amongst many others, all expressed support for eugenics, while the theme of degeneration is writ large in many seminal Modernist texts. Such views, which today are so redolent of racism and totalitarianism, were viewed as progressive and fashionable at the time.[35] The eugenics movement was part of a broader process – described as a 'biologisation of national identity' – based on a growing intellectual consensus that human destiny was determined by evolution and heredity.[36] As Marius Turda explains, '[t]he source of national rejuvenation was similar in all cases, namely, the natural environment and peasantry (in its various permutations) both of which were deemed healthy and uncontaminated by the ills of modernity'.[37] This emphasis on the biological origins of national identity and destiny should also be looked at alongside the Modernist fascination, which Gibbon unquestionably shared, with the primordial, with primitive societies and the relatively young but immensely popular field of anthropology. The author's interest in Grafton Elliot Smith's theory of Diffusionism and his promotion of it throughout his writing is a relatively benign expression of such a tendency. It is therefore possible to conceive that a habit of falling back on ethnic categories or the semi-metaphorical use of 'blood' or 'stock' as a paradigm within early Scottish nationalism would not have been perceived as regressive. As Tom Nairn has outlined in *Faces of Nationalism*, there is a historic gulf in all approaches to nationalism as a result of the development of genetics and the mapping of the human genome in the latter part of the twentieth century. The primordial nature of individuals and nations is therefore rendered as a squarely sociological rather than biological issue: genetics 'means that the parameters of the material have been genuinely drawn, and

metaphysics is exiled from another important zone of speculative thought'.[38] Speculation about race and a habit of ascribing value to archaic racial categories such as 'Pict' or 'Kelt' combined with a will to seek to answer questions of political and cultural import with heredity, would have been seen as not only acceptable, but indeed, progressive in this era. Placing too much emphasis on such obsolete speculation in order to write off the discourse around early Scottish nationalism would render our understanding yet more obscure. Of far more relevance to our purpose is to consider the conclusions to which such speculation would lead.

The nightmare of history

If there is a single passage in his fiction that captures Gibbon's views on Scottish nationalism it can be found at the outset of his unfinished novel, *The Speak of the Mearns*:

> And the tenant if he had any wisdom left from the grind and chave of his sweating day would 'gree to that peaceful and pay more rent; if he didn't he was chased from the land he held and hounded south and out of the country, maybe strayed to Fife and was seized on there and held a slave in the Fifeshire mines, toiling naked him and his wife and bairns, unpaid, unholidayed in the long half-dark. For that was the Age of God and King when Scotland had still her nationhood.[39]

The Speak of the Mearns returns to many themes within *A Scots Quair*. Its content is notably unfiltered, as though the author is consciously foregrounding all of the ingredients that scandalised the review columns of Scotland's provincial press three years earlier on the publication of *Sunset Song*. With its more explicit references to class, sexuality and clerical hypocrisy, it offers a picture of an author with a relentless desire to shock conservative Scotland, to once again provoke a faltering society and an economic order that, as a self-declared 'revolutionary writer', he was out to destroy.[40]

The above passage possibly owes its origins to one of the most successful pieces of left-wing propaganda to emerge from early twentieth-century Scotland. Published in 1909, *Our Scots Noble Families* by Tom Johnston, then editor of *Forward*, is a searing indictment of the Scottish aristocracy and would go on to become a bestseller.[41] The historic use of slavery in Scottish mining, in particular the forms of indentured servitude codified by a 1606 Act of the Scottish Parliament, is referred to in several

of Gibbon's texts as a direct riposte to the national question. For example, in response to nationalist Ludovic Grant's assertion that 'everything English must go', Gibbon writes:

> It will profit Glasgow's hundred and fifty thousand slum-dwellers so much to know that they are being starved and brutalised by Labour Exchanges and Public Assistance Committees staffed exclusively by Gaelic-speaking, haggis-eating Scots in saffron kilts and tongued brogues, full of such typical Scottish ideals as those which kept men chained as slaves in the Fifeshire mines a century or so ago […].[42]

Gibbon's work contains a wider concern with enslavement, resulting in often graphic depictions of violence that retain their shock value even for a twenty-first century reader. In a letter to Helen Cruikshank defending the explicit portrayal of slavery and torture in *Spartacus* (1933), the enslaved miner is once again invoked as symbolic of a conception of history focusing on the poor that informed all of Gibbon's writing and that he frequently related to Scotland:

> Ancient Greece is never the Parthenon to me: it's a slave being tortured in a dungeon of the Athenian law courts […]. Ancient Scotland is never Mary Queen: it's those serfs they kept chained in the Fifeshire mines a hundred years ago. […] And so with the moderns: I am so horrified by all our dirty little cruelties and bestialities that I would feel the lowest type of skunk if I didn't shout the horror of them from the house-tops. Of course I shout too loudly. But the foul conspiracy of silence there was in the past! – and is coming again in Scotland, in a new guise, called Renaissance, and Objectivity, and National Art and what not. Blithering about Henryson and the Makars (whoever those cretins were) and forgetting the Glasgow slums.[43]

With such a perspective on history, the valorisation of Scotland's past is impossible for Gibbon and it is this, above all else, that sets him apart from early proponents of Scottish nationalism. The brutalities of class and exploitation place him firmly on the side of what we would now refer to as the subaltern – although his anti-Irish attitudes arguably problematise such a characterisation.[44] However, without the influence of Gramsci to call upon, the author's foregrounding of a historic and geographic continuum of human suffering gives the impression of being part iteration of orthodox Marxist theory, part propaganda and part literary device.

Such commitment precludes alignment with nationalism and its 'pseudo-literary romantics'.[45]

Perhaps the most definitive expression of this agenda in Gibbon's prose can be seen in the passages dealing with the radicalisation of a young Ewan Tavendale in *Grey Granite* (1934):

> [H]e lay still with a strange mist boiling, blinding his eyes, not Ewan Tavendale at all any more but lost and be-bloodied in a hundred broken and tortured bodies all over the world, in Scotland, in England, in the torture-dens of the Nazis in Germany, in the torment-pits of the Polish Ukraine, a livid, twisted thing in the prisons where they tortured Nanking Communists, a Negro boy in an Alabama cell while they thrust razors into his flesh, castrating with a lingering cruelty and care. He was one with them all, a long wail of sobbing mouths and wrung flesh, tortured and tormented by the world's Masters while those Masters lied about Progress through Peace, Democracy, Justice, the Heritage of Culture […].[46]

Here Scotland is reduced to just another site of violence borne of a crisis-ridden capitalism heading towards conflagration. This tension between becoming 'LIVING HISTORY ONESELF', as Communist organiser Jim Trease remarks to Ewan, and the necessarily brutal extinction of individual or national consciousness is a key theme.[47] Gibbon's propaganda is explicit: *Grey Granite*'s narrative drive is to be found in Ewan's growing consciousness of global, undead historic masses and a contemporary proletariat; a disavowal of 'the tawdry promisings of Labourities, Douglasites' and a oneness with 'that army of pain and blood and torment that was yet the raggedest van of the hordes of the Last of the Classes, the Ancient Lowly'.[48] All history, as demonstrated by Ewan's premonitory visit to a museum earlier in the novel, is defined by the sufferings of 'peasants and slaves and the common folk and their ghastly lives through six thousand years'.[49]

Alongside the rhetorical excess of such passages, amplified by the weak characterisation of Ewan, there is a counterpoint to the propaganda. The author's mastery of narrative focalisation finds its highest achievement in its ability to give voice to multiple individuals within wider categories of identity. Reading history as Gibbon does, with the Diffusionist mythical Golden Age offering the only chink of light, the enormity of the nightmare is not simply the all-encompassing reality of human suffering under capitalism; it comprises all ideologies, including nationalism, which offer apparently progressive narratives within that system.

Calling to mind Oscar Wilde's 1891 essay 'The Soul of Man under Socialism', the idea that such universal cruelty might adopt progressive clothes is, for Gibbon, the ultimate crime. The 'dreary rash of nationalism' is just one of several competing ideologies within capitalism, though, for Gibbon, even a communism capable of sweeping away the Glasgow slums had a purely instrumental function.[50] This conception of history is brought right up to the present and, indeed, gestures towards something beyond politics; it is the horror of enslavement itself and the breaking of the human in any setting that defines both Gibbon's politics and art, as outlined in a letter to Eric Linklater:

> I loathe organisation, control, the state, and the voice of the serjeant-major. […] I'm naturally an anarchist. But how you or I, or – more to the point – our unfortunate progeny, can attain real freedom and fun without the preliminary conditioning of Communism is beyond me. Communism's merely a means to an end […].[51]

If *A Scots Quair* falters, finally, in its revolutionary call as embodied in Ewan, this becomes modulated by the refusal of Chris to endorse her sons 'faith': '*The world's sought faith for thousands of years and found only death or unease in them. Yours is just another dark cloud to me – or a great rock you're trying to push up a hill.*'[52] History remains nightmarish, a dark cloud, and ideology is only part of a wider trap and yet more toil. As Cairns Craig has argued, throughout *A Scots Quair* Chris's view of history is cyclical, in contrast to her husband and son who become, through war and political agitation, lost in external historic events, one marching to the trenches, and the other on a hunger march in London.[53] The lack of narrative resolution in *A Scots Quair* has to be considered in the context of a collapsing political order. Like many writers of his day, Gibbon witnessed the rise of communism and fascism, 'brutal and quick, determined, desperate, mutually destructive', and an era of political and economic crisis in which decline and collapse seemed ever more pertinent.[54] To proclaim victory for either side – Ewan's revolutionary 'GOD' or Chris's instinctive 'FREEDOM' – would have been both bad politics and bad art.[55]

A cosmopolitan Pict

There is an unavoidable irony when we consider Gibbon's caustic approach to Scottish nationalism. In a manner entirely unforeseeable for the author,

his fiction would become a significant source of inspiration for prominent nationalist politicians. After the seminal 1962 West Lothian by-election, Billy Wolfe, who would later go on to lead a newly insurgent SNP, cited *A Scots Quair* as the inspiration for his candidacy.[56] When Nicola Sturgeon became leader of the SNP and First Minister of Scotland in 2014, a *Scotsman* profile noted the formative influence of *Sunset Song* on a teenage Sturgeon, a book that 'felt in harmony with her emerging nationalism'.[57] Without entering into the realms of speculation – a constant challenge for any assessment of a career that ended so abruptly – we can assume that, for a revolutionary writer such as Gibbon, spurring on social democrats to seek political office would have been deeply contrary to his propagandist aims. But it is worth focusing on the continuing impact that such influence suggests. Indeed, after eight decades, the resonance of Gibbon's writing seems undiminished. For despite the gulf between a contemporary pro-independence movement and its tartan-clad ancestors, or all of the great shocks that would impact on the development of the Left in Europe, in particular the post-1968 Gramsci-inspired New Left, the manner in which Gibbon interrogates ideology retains both political and literary significance up to the present day. For a writer engaging with politics long before the term 'identity' became common to political discourse, his work retains remarkable salience on that very subject. Leaving aside his typically Modernist fixation with race, the definitive element of Gibbon's still potent flyting with Scottish nationalism is its inability to cohere with a Marxist interpretation of history. As Neil Davidson has argued, the positing of any form of pre-Union nationalism, or indeed the existence of an ancient Scottish nationality, is heavily problematic from a Marxist perspective.[58] In reality, when Scottish nationalism first emerged it was, despite its own protestations to the contrary, entirely novel. This is why Gibbon's distance from the nationalism of his day recalls Eric Hobsbawn's assertion that 'history is the raw material of nationalist or ethnic or fundamentalist ideologies, as poppies are the raw material for heroin addiction'.[59] A desire to sidestep such appropriation informs a compelling narrative device, but is also a deeply political point about identity. If, as Gibbon's writing implies, history is cyclical, then the only solutions that he is prepared to countenance are ones that break it, that are in some sense ahistorical. The ambiguous ending of *A Scots Quair* is a useful example: as in *Spartacus*, it is a cyclical return to its beginning. By finally taking Chris back to her childhood origins, Gibbon is implicitly writing in the closest expression of what might be described as his own identity politics. This took the form of a profoundly personal affinity

with his peasant origins and an authentic, if caveated, delight in a Pictish heritage that stretches back beyond antiquity:

> I like to remember I am of peasant rearing and peasant stock. […] I feel of a strange and antique age in the company and converse of my adult peers – like an adult himself listening to the bright sayings and laughters of callow boys, parvenus on the human scene, while I, a good Venriconian [*sic*] Pict, harken from the shade of my sun circle and look away, bored, in pride of possession at my terraced crops, at the on-ding of rain and snow across my leavened fields […].[60]

Gibbon's attempt to negotiate his way through the nightmare of history is, in sharp contrast to the largely improvised *völkisch* nationalism of many of his contemporaries, premised on situating his own identity in prehistoric terms and thereby placing it outside categories of nation or culture. Such intense rootedness is not only the theme that closes *A Scots Quair*, but is also at the core of his fixation with a Diffusionist Golden Age, the primordial hunter-gatherer dream that underpins his Modernist declarations of cosmopolitanism. This standpoint is freely acknowledged as akin to nationalism, as in Gibbon's conclusion to 'Glasgow': 'a cosmopolitan opportunist I am some kind of nationalist'.[61] Indeed, when his work is looked at in depth, we see more than just dismissal of the national question from Gibbon. Rather, we see a relentless desire to question what nationalism, within all the complexities and qualifications of its Scottish context, is for. The themes of such questions – of class, cultural cringe and the role of the nation in a global system – have become a definitive part of the politics of Scottish independence in the present day. This is perhaps the most pertinent reason for continuing to develop an understanding of the relationship between Lewis Grassic Gibbon's engagement with and influence upon Scottish politics and nationalism.

CHAPTER NINE

The Battle for Civilisation in Gibbon's Science Fiction

Scott Lyall

The concept and future of civilisation were ideas much discussed in the early decades of the twentieth century, particularly between the two world wars. Civilisation was frequently perceived as being under threat, most acutely so in the 1930s when J. Leslie Mitchell/Lewis Grassic Gibbon was writing.[1] This chapter locates Gibbon's science fiction novels, *Three Go Back* (1932) and *Gay Hunter* (1934), within those debates over civilisation. While it was the concern of some commentators that civilisation – consanguineous with 'the West' – was menaced with the spectre of evolutionary degeneration, for Gibbon, it was civilisation itself, especially in its modern manifestation, which was responsible for stymieing human liberty. Gibbon's science fiction owes much to the influence of H. G. Wells. Yet in this work Gibbon would oppose what he regarded as Wells's elitist worldview, to suggest the freeing of the commons of the world from civilisation's controlling grip.

The seeming crisis of civilisation during the Modernist interwar period brought forth – particularly from the political Right – civilisation's champions. For instance, the anthropologist Lothrop Stoddard believed civilisation to be 'a recent and a fragile thing', and that history 'is littered with the wrecks of dead civilisations'.[2] Stoddard, reactionary, racialist and imperialist, thought some 'branches of mankind' more capable of civilisation than others and that those peoples who have 'stopped at some level of barbarism' were a serious problem for civilisation.[3] He numbered the 'barbarian stocks' as 'the peoples of Asia, the American Indians, and the African negroes' – all non-Caucasians.[4] For Stoddard, 'Natural Equality […] is a figment of the human imagination', whereas inequality is an 'iron law'.[5] Stoddard, in common with many others in the early decades of the twentieth century, thought that civilisation's problems sprang from '[r]acial impoverishment' and hereditary rather than environmental factors; as such, he promoted eugenics – a 'science of race betterment'

that is 'the mightiest transformation of ideas that the world has ever seen' – as a means to a superior race of people who would keep civilisation alive.[6] Striking a Social Darwinist note, he claims that 'evolution means a process of ever-growing inequality', one which has seen the rise of what he calls the 'Under-Man'.[7] The Under-Man is the converse of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, or Overman, the super-human who transcends Christian morality to create a dynamic new elite value-system. Stoddard's Under-Man consists of the lower social orders and non-whites. He sees the Under-Man as a biological inferior, the result of poor breeding rather than poor social conditions, and characterises the Bolshevik Revolution as 'The Rebellion of the Under-Man'.[8] Stoddard opposes Marxism and Bolshevism as 'modern doctrines of revolt' against civilisation emerging from 'the inevitable discontent of individuals or groups placed at cultural levels above their inborn capacities and their instinctive desire to revert from these uncongenial surroundings to others lower but more congenial'.[9] Significantly, in lieu of Gibbon's Diffusionist-inspired ideas, he also attacks 'the "Lure of the Primitive"', especially the vogue of Rousseau, who 'was born of unsound stock'.[10]

Stoddard's racial theories entered popular consciousness when mentioned with approval by a character in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and he was certainly not alone in this period in proposing a eugenical solution to civilisation's problems.[11] The Egyptologist Flinders Petrie, who, like Stoddard, believed civilisation was an 'an intermittent phenomenon', hoped that 'eugenics will, in some future civilisation, carefully segregate fine races, and prohibit continual mixture, until they have a distinct type, which will start a new civilisation'.[12] Petrie was friends with Francis Galton, who coined the term eugenics in 1883.[13] As Richard Overy points out, eugenics had significant adherents in Britain, such as the economist J. M. Keynes, the sexologist Havelock Ellis, and Darwin's grandson Thomas Huxley, but it was under Hitler's National Socialist regime in Germany that '[t]he power of popular biological argument was evident in its most extreme form'.[14] The fascist threat and the social and political effects of the Depression caused a crisis for capitalism in the 1930s, and also undermined the idea that civilisation as it was understood in Britain would be a permanent feature of life in the West. Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, first published in English in 1926 and popular with the intelligentsia and many Modernist writers, played some part in the view that civilisations came and went in a cyclical pattern, as opposed to the notion of ever-ascendant domination held by the British imperial ruling class of the nineteenth century. However, the work of

archaeologists such as Petrie and Gibbon's Diffusionist anthropologists in rediscovering and reinterpreting ancient civilisations such as Egypt also increased the sense that if once great civilisations could fall into ruins then so too could modern Western civilisation.

Gibbon provides his own account of the collapse of an ancient civilisation in *The Conquest of the Maya* (1934), described by the Diffusionist Elliot Smith as 'a great work'.[15] Gibbon discusses the Maya in novels such as *Image and Superscription* (1933) and *The Thirteenth Disciple* (1931), whose hero Maudslay is named after the explorer who played a key role in deciphering Maya hieroglyphics. As in those works, he uses his only book-length anthropological volume to promote the Diffusionist view that it is migration and not evolution that leads to human culture and that there is no evolutionary inevitability to the attainment of civilisation, claiming that people 'learn by imitativeness, by absorption: inventiveness is the most uncommon of faculties in a cultureless condition'.[16] Gibbon understands the ephemeral, fragile nature of civilisations. However, unlike Stoddard and Petrie, who propose the breeding of finer types to lead civilisation from its current impasse, Gibbon rejects racial and cultural purity and argues against those 'who see all civilisations as separate ferments in hermetically sealed containers'.[17] While Stoddard imagines the barbarous Under-Man, a racial and social degenerate menacing modern civilisation and suggesting a two-stream evolution that creates winners and losers, Gibbon proposes that modern civilisation is the barbarity because it creates and tolerates the conditions in which Stoddard's Under-Man is born – as well as producing Stoddard and his fascist ideas. Stoddard scorns the Rousseauesque fashion for the primitive, but Gibbon's fascination with ancient civilisations and the origins of humanity stems in part from his desire to continually maintain the innate goodness of human beings, such as this from *Conquest of the Maya*: 'there was no slow upward climb from primitive to savage, savage to barbarian, barbarian to civilised man […]. Civilisation rose from the midst of primitive freedom'.[18] Gibbon rejects Spengler's 'theories of cyclic catastrophe' as explanation for the fall of the ancient Mayan culture, claiming instead that a 'feeble and debased' civilisation was open to Spanish imperial invasion.[19] Yet his focus on the distant past is no sterile historicism but rather a means to rethink the present, as Gibbon asks whether the fate of the Maya is 'indictment for the codes and crimes of our own civilisation, [and] prophecy for it of a fate as fantastic and terrible'.[20]

The crimes and fate of Gibbon's own civilisation figure centrally in his science fiction. However, J. Derrick McClure argues that to categorise

Three Go Back and *Gay Hunter* as science fiction 'would require a fairly broad interpretation of the term' since 'once the travelers have been deposited in their new time period, nothing happens that defies the laws of nature as we know them'.[21] Instead, McClure calls them 'didactic fantasy', which emphasises their politically corrective element,[22] although Gibbon himself described *Three Go Back* 'as a holiday from more serious things' and claimed that *Gay Hunter* 'has no serious intent whatever'.[23] Such remarks, coming as they do in the dedication to each novel, perform the obligatory modesty topos, as well as confirming what Adam Roberts calls the 'ghettoisation' of science fiction as genre fiction that is perceived as being inferior to literary art.[24] However, it remains true that Gibbon's science fiction does not rank among his best works, such as *A Scots Quair* (1932–34) and *Spartacus* (1933); indeed, Douglas Young calls *Three Go Back* 'the least rewarding of Mitchell's novels'.[25] While science fiction is typically speculative, McClure's phrase points to the importance to Gibbon's sci-fi of his Diffusionist views, although we might question how the *a priori* adoption of an anthropological position, itself a product of modern civilisation, squares with the radical freedom from civilisation proposed in the novels themselves. 'Scientific romances', the phrase utilised by H. G. Wells for his science fiction, is a more fitting description, especially considering the romance plots in each novel and the influence of Romanticism and Wells on Gibbon's work.

'Good old H. G.!' thinks would-be-author John Garland in *Stained Radiance* (1930), Gibbon's first novel.[26] Wells's influence was important to Gibbon as a writer who disputed the conventional modes of civilisation. Gibbon's library contained volumes by 'Shelley and the Romantics, Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites, Gorky and the Socialist Realists, Morris, Wells, Shaw, and even, latterly, MacDiarmid', all authors who, as William K. Malcolm points out, 'consciously challenged traditionally accepted standards'.[27] Young believes that Gibbon's 'whole attitude to writing, his determination to see himself as a journalist or a propagandist, a historian or a scientist, as anything but an artist, […] stems from Wells'.[28] Wells gave some approval to Gibbon's writing, saying in correspondence with the Scot that he liked *Stained Radiance* and *Three Go Back*,[29] although he refused to allow private endorsements to be used as a puff.[30] Wells did, however, give a more generous appraisal after Gibbon's death:

> It is rather difficult to state J. Leslie Mitchell's exact position as a writer. I knew him personally. He sent me one of his books & I liked it & wrote to him about it. He wrote well & had a vivid imagination. Some of his

> imaginative romances will certainly be reprinted sooner or later. He is a man of 'distinguished' promise & I think he would have lived to be a very outstanding writer. […] He was fine, brilliant & original.[31]

Adam Roberts argues that Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) – the seminal text of modern science fiction – is 'a piece of self-reflexive textuality' that comments on science fiction as a genre.[32] Gibbon's science fiction can be understood as existing in a similar relation to Wells's work. His scientific romances, written under his real name, J. Leslie Mitchell, are formally and intellectually influenced by Wells novels such as *The Time Machine* and *A Modern Utopia* (1905). Yet Gibbon engages with Wells in order ultimately to renounce his thought and worldview. *Three Go Back* and *Gay Hunter*, written as Hitler came to power in the early 1930s, are Gibbon's oblique response to the fascist threat and illustrate his belief that fascism is not an aberration from democratic European norms but actually the brutal apotheosis of capitalism and a consequence of a corrupt, militaristic civilisation. At the same time, these novels are rejoinders to Wellsian pessimism, elitism and evolutionism, all of which, for Gibbon, issue in an authoritarian politics and society.

Darko Suvin defines science fiction 'as the *literature of cognitive estrangement*'.[33] This is an implicit promise of the prospective radicalism of science fiction. Reality is estranged in science fiction in order that reality can be challenged and changed in the real world.[34] Cognition means both the critiquing of reality and the importance of science, and 'implies not only a reflecting *of* but also *on* reality […] a creative approach tending toward a dynamic transformation rather than toward a static mirroring of the author's environment'.[35] Estrangement – or defamiliarisation – can lead to the reconfiguration of reality along radical lines. However, as Suvin points out, it can also reach a reactionary conclusion, 'a formal, surface sensationalism that first shocks the bourgeois but then rejoins him'.[36] This is a criticism that can be levelled at Gibbon's science fiction, as both *Three Go Back* and *Gay Hunter* clumsily deposit their characters back in the safety of bourgeois normality as if the main action had been merely a dream – although Keith Sinclair and Clair Stranlay of *Three Go Back* vow on their return to the world to engage to change it in line with their utopian ideals.

Whether being read as popular entertainment or radical critique of reality, the cognitive estrangement central to science fiction was happening apace in the real world, too. What Stephen Kern calls the 'concept of simultaneity', the collision of time and space in the synchronicity of the

present, characterises the modern age in which technological advances led to both social progress and human and environmental destruction.[37] Kern, examining the period 1880 to 1918, argues that 'World War I was the ultimate drama of simultaneity, as millions of men, wearing wristwatches for the first time in history, acted in unison in response to telephone messages sent to their commanders from headquarters'.[38] Modernist literature explored the 'drama of simultaneity' in various ways, principally through multiple interweaving narratives and the use of stream-of-consciousness.[39] James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) is arguably the pinnacle of such innovations. Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, pondering the transitory nature of civilisations, and anticipating the catastrophe to come, believes he can 'hear the ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry, and time one livid final flame'.[40] Science fiction especially relies upon the simultaneity of space and time in order to propel characters into the future or the past. Wells's Time Traveller, who finds himself in the year AD 802,701, explains in *The Time Machine* that '[t]here are really four dimensions, three which we call the three planes of Space, and a fourth, Time', and he points out the 'tendency to draw an unreal distinction between the former three dimensions and the latter, because it happens that our consciousness moves intermittently in one direction along the latter from the beginning to the end of our lives', before concluding that 'Time is only a kind of Space'.[41]

The collapse of space-time distinctions in *The Time Machine* enables a view of a possible future that is at the same time a comment on the Victorian present. Wells's Eloi and Morlocks can clearly be read as representing the ruling and working classes, with their Upperworld and Underworld paralleled in the superstructure and base of Marxist theory. But in *The Time Machine* Wells fictionalises contemporary fears over the social effects of evolution by merging the sociological with the biological to create two distinct races so that, similar to Stoddard's eugenical thinking, social class *is* socio-biology. Wells, like the young Gibbon, was influenced by T. H. Huxley's evolutionism; indeed, the semi-autobiographical Malcom Maudslay of *The Thirteenth Disciple* has read the evolutionists Huxley, Ernst Haeckel, Herbert Spencer and Darwin's *Origin of Species* by the age of thirteen.[42] But whereas Gibbon would reject Evolutionary theory for Diffusionism, Wells, while cleaving to his belief in the evolutionary process, would remain pessimistic as to its results.[43] *The Time Machine* is Wells's warning to an anaemic elite that it must rule or risk extinction.

As Spencerian Social Darwinism mutates to eugenicism, a new Dark Age dawns in the 1930s with the rise of fascism; indeed, Darwinian evolutionism has been identified as one of the crucial, if indirect, underpinnings of the scientism central to twentieth-century totalitarianism, especially Nazi bio-politics.[44] Overy calls the period from the end of the First World War to the outbreak of the Second 'the morbid age'.[45] By this he means the economic Depression, but also intellectual introspection over the fate of civilisation, which Sigmund Freud examines in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). Neurosis, according to Freud, is a consequence of the communal demands of civilisation repressing individual instinctual desires. However, Freud rejects the idea that there is any solution to this problem in back-to-nature primitivism:

> It is contended that much of the blame for our misery lies with what we call our civilisation, and that we should be far happier if we were to abandon it and revert to primitive conditions. I say this is astonishing because, however one defines the concept of civilisation, it is certain that all the means we use in our attempts to protect ourselves against the threat of suffering belong to this very civilisation.[46]

Both *Three Go Back* and *Gay Hunter* endorse the primitivism of which Freud complains. Indeed, while the title of *Three Go Back* refers to going back in time ('between thirty and twenty thousand years before the birth of Christ'), it also means going back to a simpler, more natural life in which the repressions wrought by civilisation are discarded along with the characters' clothes.[47] Despite being set twenty thousand years in the future, *Gay Hunter* also promotes naturism, for, as McClure states, in these novels 'the world of the distant past and that of the distant future are remarkably similar'.[48] Such parallels do not, however, connote lazy writing or a bland view of the future. Gibbon's scientific romances strongly suggest that civilisation in its current form is barbarous and that the Evolutionary School of thought, derived from Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), is not only wrong, but has contributed to a warlike civilisation that can only defeat itself. As Young explains,

> when Darwin presented his theory of man's evolution from the beast, anthropologists were given reason for seeing primitive man as a savage, and the history of human development as a matter of more sophisticated institutions being developed to curb the innate savagery of nature.[49]

By taking his characters back to a lost Atlantis in *Three Go Back* and forward to post-apocalypse devastation in *Gay Hunter*, Gibbon is not only proposing that we fight for a new kind of civilisation, but advocating a different anthropological theory of human origins – Diffusionism – through which to begin imagining that better future. Gibbon described himself as 'a revolutionary writer', but he was suspicious of Marxist authors with a narrow conception of literary quality who believed that to be revolutionary it was enough to employ 'a little bad Marxian patter and the single adjective "bourgeois" in their vocabularies'.[50] He claimed to 'hate capitalism', saying 'all my books are explicit or implicit propaganda'.[51] Gibbon's works are indeed anti-capitalist, but they are so through propagandising for his idea of Diffusionism and an essentially good human nature. We are taken in his science fiction to past and future environments where capitalist civilisation simply does not exist, and the battle is to ensure it never does. To employ Engels's distinctions: Gibbon is not a 'scientific' socialist, but a 'utopian' or romantic socialist.[52]

Romantic conceptions are central to *Three Go Back*. Clair Stranlay is a bestselling romantic novelist who takes a trip to New York on the airship *Magellan's Cloud* to escape the memory of her young lover who died on the Somme. The First World War as the ultimate tragedy of modern Western civilisation in which a lover is lost is also a key factor in novels such as *The Thirteenth Disciple* and *Sunset Song*; as Clair realises, 'civilisation has its prices'.[53] Clair's commercial analogy is apt given her own status as a writer of popular romantic pulp. Just as Gibbon uses Kailyard tropes in order to parody them in *Sunset Song*, so he deploys a romantic plot in the scientific romance *Three Go Back* while at the same time seeking to subvert the very civilisation that produces and values romance fiction. Gibbon can remove his characters from civilisation and its compromises, but as an author he remains ambivalently implicated; his scientific romances are both products of the marketplace of capitalist civilisation and protests against it. The main protest *In Three Go Back* comes from the American Dr Keith Sinclair. Sinclair's nationality is significant and is shared by the eponymous Gay Hunter. To be American in this period connotes the promise of a new, freer society, its people less hamstrung by the traditional moral concerns and class snobbery of the tired old civilisation of Britain. Sinclair, an organiser for the League of Militant Pacifists, can see that another war is coming and has recently been deported from Italy and Germany – a fascist and nascent fascist regime in 1932 when *Three Go Back* was published. When the airship goes down in the Atlantic, Clair and Keith find themselves the only surviving

passengers along with Conservative MP and armaments manufacturer Sir John Mullaghan on the island of Atlantis.

Atlantis fascinated Gibbon: a lost civilisation (from which the Maya were reputed to be descended) with mythic resonance and utopian connotations. The Atlantis of *Three Go Back* symbolises the historically precarious position of all civilisations: doomed to oblivion, yet forever to return as a revenant of every subsequent civilisation. The 'time-spirals and retro-cognitive memory' enabling Gibbon to locate his characters back in time on Plato's mythical island may sound like gobbledegook, but Clair's thoughts on time can help us to understand Gibbon's view of history: 'The world used always, I thought, to roll along a straight line called Time, instead of looping the loop with a thousand ghosts of itself before and after it. And none of them ghost, and none the reality.'[54] The question as to whether Atlantis was a fiction or a reality further blurs the lines of time and space and our reading of history. The ghosts of ancient civilisations haunt Modernist literature, such as Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and Ezra Pound's *Cantos*. Indeed, the time loops that baffle Clair resemble W. B. Yeats's gyres from 'The Second Coming', a poem that poses the question as to what will replace a waning Christian civilisation. In these texts, as in Gibbon's *Sunset Song*, where Chris Guthrie dreams she sees 'a foreign creature' who shouts out in Greek '*The ships of Pytheas!*', the past inhabits the present in such a manner as to trouble the Enlightenment idea of a progressive history in which time's arrow faces resolutely forward.[55] Evolutionism proposes a historical trajectory from chaos to civilisation informing Enlightenment linearity. This has political implications, as Young points out: 'The theory [of evolution] was a godsend to the imperialist for the white man was revealed as simply helping the native along the evolutionary road which he was bound to travel anyhow'.[56] In *Three Go Back* the natural innocence of the primitive hunters not only challenges the Evolutionist view of our savage origins, but undermines the imperial mission of capturing and civilising autochthonous peoples and their lands.

The hunters of *Three Go Back* are living in what Sinclair describes as 'the Golden Age of the human race'.[57] Sinclair is here an author-surrogate who explains Diffusionism: a school of anthropology speculating on the grounds for the spread of culture and the rise of civilisations, some of whose adherents pointed to the originary importance of ancient Egypt.[58] He tells the others that 'all the history books and all the anthropological theories of the twentieth century tell the most foolish lies', when in fact 'Rousseau was right' in his argument for essential human goodness 'and

the twentieth century evolutionists all wrong'.[59] At first Keith, Clair and Sir John struggle without the comforts and distractions of civilisation, and Clair imagines herself back in London in a passage that could be from Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925):

> It's a September afternoon in London now. There are dead leaves in the parks, and a lot of people at the Zoo drinking tea under the trees. The motor-buses going round Trafalgar Square and the pigeons are twittering on the roofs of St. Martin's in the Field. And there's been an accident in Hammersmith Broadway, and an ambulance has come up, and the policeman is shooing back the crowd. And Big Ben says it's twenty past three, and Jean Borrow in my flat is writing a Lido novel, and there's an unemployment procession, and there's Bond Street and shops and early door queues in Leicester Square for an Edgar Wallace play … Just now. And it's not now. It won't happen for twenty-five thousand years.[60]

Mrs Dalloway offers an acute analysis of the personal consequences of civilisation's repressions. Big Ben, central to the mechanisms of civilisation in Woolf's novel, symbolises London's imperial centrality in Western metropolitan civilisation. However, in *Mrs Dalloway* there is a disjunction between imperious time-on-the-clock and fluid time-in-the-mind, and Woolf's stream-of-consciousness exposes the psychological burdens – in Freudian vein – of civilisation's repressive demands. In contrast, for Clair in *Three Go Back* it is the absence of civilisation that is initially the burden, and the unbearable lassitude of waiting for time to begin. And just how tedious it all seems is surely the chief problem in Gibbon's vision of the Golden Age. Young captures this nicely: 'As Milton discovered, it is difficult to write of paradise for nothing happens there that is of interest to us fallen creatures.'[61] The introduction of the Neanderthalers is, for Young, a means of enlivening the plot, but a critical philosophical error 'for it involves a complete contradiction of the ostensible meaning of the action; what it amounts to is an admission that war and terror and suffering did exist in primitive times'.[62]

Young's analysis fails to see that *Three Go Back* is Gibbon's response to Wells's *The Time Machine*. Wells's Morlocks and Eloi are the warped evolutionary outcome of nineteenth-century class hierarchies; Gibbon's beastly Neanderthalers and peaceful Cro-Magnard hunters offer a parallel to the Wellsian dichotomy. The Cro-Magnards, who would seem to resemble the Eloi, are, according to Sinclair, 'decent kindly animals of anthropoid blood' and belong to 'the stock that produced ourselves'; the

Neanderthalers – 'the sullen, individualist beast whose ferocity is perhaps maladjustment of body and a general odd, black resentment against life' – are, in contrast, from 'another strain' and look very like Wells's Morlocks.[63] While the innocent Cro-Magnard hunters are the ancestors of poets and mystics, 'the Christs and Father Damiens, the Brunos and the Shelleys', the Neanderthalers find their atavistic survival in 'the militarists and the hanging judges and the gloomy deans of the twentieth century'.[64] Gibbon generates a biological distinction to explain different world-views or sociological positions in a manner that echoes *The Time Machine*, as well as indulging in his own brand of eugenicism by seeking to kill off the Neanderthalers before they and their type can pollute human history. However, in the civilisation from which Keith and Clair have come, it is the Neanderthalers who are the elite in control, and the 'dying soldiers and starving miners, the Morlocks of the pits', who suffer suppression.[65] Indeed, the description of miners as 'morlocks of the pits' occurs also in *Stained Radiance*, while Gibbon elsewhere describes the Glasgow poor as 'sub-humans as definitely as the Morlocks of Wells – and without even the consolation of feeding on their oppressors' flesh'.[66] Gibbon of course knew that the real Neanderthals became extinct. But by pitting his savage Neanderthalers against the innocent Cro-Magnards, he is suggesting in *Three Go Back* that a good civilisation remains to be fought for in the present day and can never be the mere consequence of biological evolution.

Leopold Bloom is unaware that he walks in Odysseus's footsteps in Joyce's *Ulysses*, although he does know the word for such 'transmigration of souls': 'Metempsychosis […]. It's Greek: from the Greek'.[67] Clair, though, intuits that her golden age lover Ærte, Keith, and her young man who died in the Great War are one and the same: as space and time collide, the past lives on in the present. Keith and Clair return to civilisation as lovers to 'preach Atlantis', having rediscovered the radical innocence of their buried essential selves.[68] The Atlantis of the Golden Age hunters is a communal paradise intruded upon by the hellish Neanderthalers. Raymond Williams, discussing utopia in science fiction, argues that '[*t*]*he paradise and the hell* are only rarely utopian or dystopian. They are ordinarily the projections of a magical or a religious consciousness, inherently universal and timeless, thus commonly beyond the conditions of any imaginable ordinary human and worldly life.'[69] Gibbon's Diffusionist ethos takes readers back before the Fall into civilisation in a manner that does indeed imply a religious impulse. If civilisation is paradise lost, then *Three Go Back* begins time anew in the fight to see it regained.

Gay Hunter, the 'companion book' to *Three Go Back*, sends Gay into 'the forests of futurity' with much the same intent as set Clair 'on the plains of pre-history'.[70] Gibbon may claim that *Gay Hunter* is neither 'prophecy nor propaganda', but the novel uses the science fiction genre to oppose the fascism of the 1930s, as well as continuing Gibbon's ambivalent engagement with Wells.[71] Gay Hunter is a twenty-three-year-old American archaeologist who is thoroughly modern enough to like the poetry of Gertrude Stein but who, as the novel opens, is scouring the area around Stonehenge for the implements of ancient, pre-Christian civilisation (reminiscent of young Ewan Tavendale's passion for prehistoric tools in the *Quair*). Gay falls in with the English fascist Major Houghton, and gives her own diagnosis of fascism's origins: 'Bad anthropology and worse history, and the lunatic blitherings of Sigmund Freud are responsible'.[72] Gay rejects both evolutionism's theory of human beginnings and the psychoanalytic verdict on modern civilisation: each sees the savage hiding under the clothes of civilisation, and so each in its way leads to an authoritarian society and politics that seeks to tame the beast within. While Gay is fond of being naked, indicative of her unrepressed, freedom-loving nature, Major Houghton wears the fascist badge on his shirt and wants a future where '[a]ll this modernist botching of society and art and civilisation [is] finished, and discipline and breed and good taste come into their own again'.[73] Gay, Houghton and his companion Lady Jane Easterling find themselves in the future through a plot device even more fantastical than the time loops that plunge Keith and Clair back into pre-history. To enable Houghton to sleep, Gay recommends 'a stunt in sleep-making' borrowed from J. W. Dunne's *An Experiment with Time* (1927).[74] When this experiment goes wrong they are hurled twenty thousand years into the future.

Dunne argues for the simultaneity of time (he uses the term 'serial'): the past and the future are contained in the present, but we can only have a 'prevision' of what is to come in that dream state between wakefulness and sleep.[75] 'If prevision be a fact,' claims Dunne, it 'destroys absolutely the entire basis of all our past opinions of the universe' and – most crucially for Gibbon's vision of the future in *Gay Hunter* – 'the foreseen event may be avoided'.[76] Dunne's book may have been brought to Gibbon's attention by Wells's *The Shape of Things to Come*, first published in 1933, only a year before *Gay Hunter*. *The Shape of Things to Come* is the 'Dream book' of League of Nations diplomat Dr Philip Raven and uses Dunne's theories to 'anticipate the future'.[77] Wells points to the 'disaster in the second and third decades of the twentieth century' for 'the Capitalist

System as it was called', before prophesying the coming of world government between 1965 and 2106.[78] The Wellsian vision of a 'One World-State' will not be a democracy, and, like Stalin's 'engineers of the human soul', will 'rule not only the planet but the human will'.[79] *The Shape of Things to Come* is 'a theory of world revolution' that sees future history as 'a string of accidents with an increasingly disastrous trend, until a comprehensive faith in the modernised World-State, socialistic, cosmopolitan and creative, takes hold of the human imagination'.[80] For the World State to come about ordinary people must be led by 'an aggressive order of religiously devoted men and women who will try out and establish and impose a new pattern of living upon our race'.[81]

Gay's thoughts on finding herself in the future demonstrate Gibbon's views on Wells, science fiction, and the varied twentieth-century imaginings of futurity:

> What lay beyond – what strange world of men in this lost century? She thought of books of speculation she had read on the future – books of the early Wells, of [author-astronomer Camille] Flammarion, of their hosts of imitators; books that pictured the sciences mounting and growing, piling great crystalline pyramids of knowledge and technique into alien skies, with men their servitors, changing and altering with them, physically and psychically, mislaying legs and intestinal tubes, sprouting many arms, becoming bisexual, becoming as strange and repulsive gods dominating a strange and repulsive earth. She thought of the fantastic beings of a play, *Back to Methuselah*, by one of the quack prophets of that remote time [Bernard Shaw] – the remote time in which she herself was born! – who were bred to long lives of thousands of years and spent them in meditation on the Oneness of Life! What a eunuch's dream! Or the younger Huxley, with a machine-made world and machine-made humans, undergoing a fantastic existence conditioned of the bleak lunacy of their author's anthropological beliefs…. Worlds without end that had been foisted upon the future. And which, if any, had that world accepted?[82]

What Gay finds in the future gives the lie to the fantastical fictional depictions that she has read. In *Gay Hunter* the 'fall and passing of civilisation' has happened all over the world after atomic war.[83] The Hierarchs, a fascist elite who controlled the State, had been at war to suppress 'the Revolt of the Sub-Men', 'those classes from which the Hierarchs drew their helots and servants'.[84] War between Hierarchs and Sub-Men signifies the conflict of total politics of the 1930s – fascism and communism – projected

into the future. The Sub-Men, described as 'the Ancient Lowly', are reminiscent of Stoddard's Under-Men, but whereas Stoddard is hostile to this class, seeing it as a threat to civilisation, in Gibbon's more sympathetic imagination they lead an 'international revolt' against the Hierarchs, 'a last tremendous revolt' before the light of civilisation is finally extinguished.[85]

Gibbon's Hierarchs are his warning of the fascist threat in Germany in the 1930s, but also constitute his response to the contention in Wells's *The Shape of Things to Come* that humanity should be led to a World State by a dedicated elite. A fascist elite is represented in *Gay Hunter* by Major Houghton and Lady Jane, who wish to rebuild a new hierarchical civilisation from the ruins of the old. Gibbon opposes such authoritarianism, proposing instead the radical innocence and freedom of the Folk. 'Folk' is a highly contentious term to use in the context of the politics of the 1930s, especially given Nazi objections to a degenerate modern civilisation, and conjures images of the German *Volk* and blood and soil (*Blut und Boden*) Nazism. But Gibbon's Folk, like the Cro-Magnard hunters of *Three Go Back*, are not war-mongering nationalists, but peace-loving people who dream of 'building some New Life and way of life' that is 'free of the nightmare of civilisation'.[86] When Gay asks about the Singers of the Folk, she is told that '[t]hey set tales upon the truth, to make it more true' – an apposite description of how Gibbon used Diffusionism to propagate an anti-Evolutionist view of human nature and origins.[87] Sinclair from *Three Go Back* and Gay Hunter are pacifists, but each knows that if a peaceful new civilisation is to be created it must needs be fought for. This is the battle undertaken by Gibbon in his science fiction.

Endnotes

Introduction

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1: Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Modernism

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2: Language, Class and Social Power in *A Scots Quair*

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6 Gibbon, *Sunset Song*, p. xiii.
7 The biographical accounts are based on David Schwartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997) and Ian S. Munro, *Leslie Mitchell: Lewis Grassic Gibbon* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966).
8 Gibbon, *Sunset Song*, p. 121.
9 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity. 1991), p. 67.
10 Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*; see also Aneta Pavlenko and Adrian Blackledge, *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2004).
11 For a discussion of this, see Hanne Tange, 'Writing the Nation: Four inter-war visions of Scotland' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2000).
12 Jan Blommaert, *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
13 Corbett, in *A Flame in the Mearns*; Ian Campbell, 'The Grassic Gibbon Style', *Studies in Scottish Fiction*, ed. by J. Schwend and H. Drescher (Frankfurt am Mainz: Peter Lang, 1990), pp. 271–87.
14 Gibbon, *Sunset Song*, p. 156.
15 Ibid., p. 10.
16 Ibid., p. 246.
17 Gibbon, *Cloud Howe*, in *A Scots Quair*, ed. by Thomas Crawford (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1995), p. 15.

18 For instance, Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Grey Granite*, in *A Scots Quair*, ed. by Thomas Crawford (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1995), p. 26.
19 Hanne Tange, 'Grassic Gibbon's Art of Community: *A Scots Quair* and the Condition of Scotland', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 33–34 (2004), pp. 247–62.
20 Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, p. 47.
21 Gibbon, Gibbon, *Sunset Song*, p. 20.
22 Ibid., p. 156.
23 Ibid., p. 32.
24 Ibid.
25 Gibbon, *Cloud Howe*, p. 17; Gibbon, *Grey Granite*, p. 21.
26 Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, p. 47.
27 See Thomas Hylland-Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2010) for a detailed discussion of 'US' and 'THEM' identification.
28 David Macaree, 'Myth and Allegory in Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 2.1 (1964), pp. 45–55; Keith Dixon, 'Lewis Grassic Gibbon, Scotland and Nationalism', *Nationalism in Literature: Literature, Language and National Identity*, ed. by Horst W. Drescher and Hermann Völkel (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989), pp. 201–11; Ian Campbell, *Lewis Grassic Gibbon* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985).
29 Gibbon, 'Literary Lights', in *Scottish Scene*, p. 200.
30 Gibbon, *Grey Granite*, p. 81.
31 Ibid., p. 31.
32 Ibid., p. 75.
33 Gibbon, 'Literary Lights', in *Scottish* Scene, p. 205.
34 Thomas Crawford, 'Introduction', *Cloud Howe*, p. ix.
35 Gibbon, *Cloud Howe*, p. 196.
36 Ibid., p. 110.
37 For instance, Gibbon, *Grey Granite*, pp. 73, 139.
38 Ibid., p. 155.
39 Edwin Muir's *Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer* (London: Routledge, 1936) opposed the cultural nationalism of Hugh MacDiarmid by arguing that Scottish writers should abandon Scots and the Scots tradition and merge their work with what Muir regarded as the organic tradition of English literature.
40 Murray, in *The History of Scottish Literature, IV*, pp. 103–17; Campbell, *Lewis Grassic Gibbon*, pp. 44–57.

3. The Shifting Identities of Mitchell and Gibbon

1. The term was borrowed from Denis Saurat's 'Le Groupe de "la Renaissance Écossaise"', *Revue Anglo-Americaine*, (April 1924), pp. 1–13. Two years before, however, MacDiarmid, writing as C. M. Grieve, had heralded the birth of 'a Scottish renascence' in his Editor's 'Causerie', *Scottish Chapbook*, 1.1 (August 1922), pp. 3–4.
2. See, among others, *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland, 1918–1939: Source Documents for the Scottish Renaissance*, ed. by Margery Palmer McCulloch (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2004), and Margery Palmer McCulloch, *Scottish Modernism and Its Contexts, 1918–1959: Literature, National Identity and Cultural Exchange* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).
3. The present chapter will refer to the author mainly as Mitchell, in an attempt to retrieve the complexity of his work, only too often flattened as the 'Scottish' work of Grassic Gibbon.
4. J. Leslie Mitchell, *Stained Radiance: A Fictionist's Prelude* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1993), p. 38; J. Leslie Mitchell, 'He Who Seeks'; reprinted in *Smeddum: A Lewis Grassic Anthology*, ed. by Valentina Bold (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001), p. 223.
5. Lewis Grassic Gibbon, 'The Antique Scene', in Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Hugh MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene, or The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn* (London: Jarrolds, 1934); reprinted in *Smeddum*, p. 5.
6. Ibid.
7. See for instance, G. Elliot Smith, *The Diffusion of Culture* (1933) and William James Perry, *The Primordial Ocean* (1935).
8. See, for instance, Douglas Gifford, *Neil M. Gunn & Lewis Grassic Gibbon* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1983).
9. See, for instance, James M. Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993).
10. See Carla Sassi, 'Prismatic Modernities: Towards a Recontextualisation of Scottish Modernism', in *Scottish and International Modernisms: Relationships and Reconfigurations*, ed. by Emma Dymock and Margery Palmer McCulloch (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2011), pp. 184–97.
11. Douglas Young, *Beyond the Sunset: A Study of James Leslie Mitchell (Lewis Grassic Gibbon)* (Aberdeen: Impulse Publications, 1973), p. 2.
12. Ibid., pp. 3–4.

13. G. Elliot Smith, 'Foreword', in J. Leslie Mitchell, *The Conquest of the Maya* (London: Jarrolds, 1934), p. 10.
14. Jeremy Idle, 'A Ferocity of Opinions', *Books in Scotland*, 40 (1991), pp. 6–7; William K. Malcolm, 'Art for Politics' Sake: The Sardonic Principle of James Leslie Mitchell (Lewis Grassic Gibbon)', in *To Hell with Culture: Anarchism and Twentieth-Century British Literature,* ed. by H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen T. Knight (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), pp. 35–50.
15. William Malcolm, in *To Hell with Culture*, p. 47.
16. Mitchell's interest in historical religions and heresies is witnessed in his non-fictional writings as, for example, in his ambitious 'Synopsis for the History of Religion'; reprinted in *Smeddum,* pp. 786–98.
17. J. Leslie Mitchell, 'The Diffusionist Heresy', *The Twentieth Century*, 1.1 (1931), pp. 14–18.
18. J. Leslie Mitchell, 'A Volcano in the Moon', in *Smeddum*, p. 266.
19. Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Cloud Howe* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1989), p. 142.
20. John Corbett, 'Ecstasy Controlled: The Prose Styles of James Leslie Mitchell and Lewis Grassic Gibbon', in *A Flame in the Mearns: Lewis Grassic Gibbon, A Centenary Celebration*, ed. by Margery Palmer McCulloch and Sarah Dunnigan (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2003), pp. 91–92.
21. Ibid., p. 93.
22. Ibid., pp. 94–97.
23. Ibid., p. 97.
24. Brian Morton, for example, in his introduction to the 1995 edition (Edinburgh: B & W Publishing) of *Stained Radiance*, describes it as 'too savagely bitter, too self-consciously ironic, too determinedly unsentimental […] to be entirely convincing or successful', p. xi.
25. Antony Shuttleworth, *And in Our Time: Vision, Revision, and British Writing of the 1930s* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2003), p. 188.
26. Mitchell, *Stained Radiance*, p. 76.
27. Ibid., p. 58.
28. Lewis Grassic Gibbon, 'Glasgow', in *Scottish Scene*; reprinted in *Smeddum*, p. 97.
29. See also Carla Sassi, 'James Leslie Mitchell/Lewis Grassic Gibbon: The Challenge of a Kaleidoscopic Identity', in *Alba Literaria: A History of Scottish Literature*, ed. by Marco Fazzini (Venezia: Amos Edizioni, 2005), pp. 519–32.

30. Ian S. Munro, *Leslie Mitchell: Lewis Grassic Gibbon* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), p. 4.
31. See Lewis Grassic Gibbon, 'The Land' and 'Glasgow'; reprinted in *Smeddum*, pp. 81–96 and pp. 97–108.
32. J. Leslie Mitchell and Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Nine against the Unknown: A Record of Geographical Exploration* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2000), p. 266.
33. Ibid., pp. 14, 12.
34. Ibid., pp. 18, 19.
35. J. Leslie Mitchell, *The Thirteenth Disciple* (Edinburgh: B & W, 1995), p. 83.
36. Ibid., pp. 82–3.
37. Ibid., p. 83.
38. Ibid., pp. 172, 200.
39. Ibid., p. 187.
40. Graham Trengove, 'Who is You? Grammar and Grassic Gibbon', in *Scottish Literary Journal*, 2 (1975), pp. 47–62.
41. John Corbett, in *A Flame in the Mearns*, p. 91.
42. See, for example, Sara J. Ford, *Gertrude Stein and Wallace Stevens: The Performance of Modern Consciousness* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
43. See, for instance, Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Literary Angus and the Mearns', *Fife and Angus Annual*, 1933, p. 17; Graeme Whittington, 'The Regionalism of Lewis Grassic Gibbon', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 90.2 (1974), pp. 75–83; Ian Carter, 'Lewis Grassic Gibbon, and the Peasantry: *A Scots Quair*', *Hist Workshop J*, 6.1 (1978), pp. 169–85; and Ian Campbell, 'The Grassic Gibbon Country', in *A Sense of Place: Studies in Scottish Local History in Memory of Eric Forbes*, ed. by Graeme Cruickshank (Edinburgh: Scotland's Cultural Heritage Unit, 1988), pp. 15–26.

4: *A Scots Quair* and History

1 Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Grey Granite*, in *A Scots Quair*, ed. by Tom Crawford (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996), pp. 148–49.
2 Ian Campbell, *Lewis Grassic Gibbon* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985), p. 48; Douglas F. Young, *Beyond the Sunset: A Study of James Leslie Mitchell (Lewis Grassic Gibbon)* (Aberdeen: Impulse, 1973), p. 92.
3 Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Sunset Song*, in *A Scots Quair*, ed. by Tom Crawford (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996), p. 5.

4 Ibid., p 12.
5 Ibid., p. 24.
6 Hugh MacDiarmid, 'The Modern Scene', in Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Hugh MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene, or The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn* (London: Jarrolds, 1934), p. 44.
7 Ibid., p. 47.
8 Ibid., p. 337.
9 Gibbon, 'Literary Lights', in *Scottish Scene*, p. 197.
10 Gibbon, *Sunset Song*, p. 33.
11 Ibid., p. 257.
12 Robert Crawford, *Bannockburns: Scottish Independence and Literary Imagination, 1314–2014* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 153.
13 Gibbon, *Sunset Song*, p. 126.
14 Ibid., p. 255.
15 Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Cloud Howe*, in *A Scots Quair*, ed. by Tom Crawford (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996), p. 45.
16 Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 63.
17 Gibbon, *Sunset Song*, p. 174.
18 Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719–1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 145.
19 Quoted in *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918–1939: Source Documents for the Scottish Renaissance*, ed. by Margery Palmer McCulloch (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2004), p. 7.
20 Gibbon, *Cloud Howe*, p. 139.
21 Nan Shepherd, *The Quarry Wood* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1987), p. 80.
22 Gibbon, *Cloud Howe*, p. 142.
23 Ibid., pp. 118–19.
24 Ibid., p. 58.
25 Ibid., p. 44.
26 Ibid., p. 172.
27 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 270.
28 Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Niger: The Life of Mungo Park* (Edinburgh: Porpoise Press, 1934), p. 27.
29 Gibbon, 'The Land', in *Scottish Scene*, pp. 293, 295.

30 Quoted in Ian S. Munro, *Leslie Mitchell: Lewis Grassic Gibbon* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), pp. 92, 174.
31 Quoted in Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 309.
32 Quoted in *Modernism and Nationalism*, p. 93.
33 Gibbon, *Grey Granite*, p. 137.
34 J. Leslie Mitchell, *Image and Superscription* (London: Jarrolds, 1933), p. 192.
35 Ibid., p. 225.
36 Gibbon, *Grey Granite*, p. 72.
37 Ibid., p. 153.
38 Quoted in Gerry Smyth, *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 47.
39 Gibbon, *Grey Granite*, p. 202.
40 Ibid., p. 202.
41 Ibid., p. 203.
42 Margery Palmer McCulloch, 'Modernism and Marxism in *A Scots Quair*', in *A Flame in the Mearns: Lewis Grassic Gibbon, A Centenary Celebration*, ed. by Margery Palmer McCulloch and Sarah M. Dunnigan (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2003), pp. 27–40 (p. 39).
43 Gibbon, *Grey Granite*, p. 204.
44 Gibbon, *Sunset Song*, p. 114.
45 Gibbon, *Cloud Howe*, p. 137.
46 Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. by Paul A. Kottman (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 84.
47 Gibbon, 'Literary Lights', in *Scottish Scene*, p. 197.
48 Cairns Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and British Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), p. 50.
49 Edwin Muir, *Essays on Literature and Society* (London: Hogarth, 1949), pp. 144–45.
50 Neil M. Gunn, *Selected Letters*, ed. by J. B. Pick (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1987), p. 42.
51 Gibbon, *Grey Granite*, p. 208.

5: Gibbon's Libertarian Fictional Politics

1 Lewis Grassic Gibbon, 'The Antique Scene', in *A Scots Hairst*: *Essays and Short Stories*, ed. by Ian S. Munro (London: Hutchison, 1983), pp. 123–41.

2 Letter to Tom Wintringham, 8 March 1934, quoted in William K. Malcolm, 'Art for Politics' Sake: The Sardonic Principle of James Leslie Mitchell (Lewis Grassic Gibbon)', in *'To Hell with Culture' - Anarchism and Twentieth-Century British Literature*, ed. by H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight (Cardiff: University of Wales Press), pp. 35–50 (p. 40).
3 Keith Dixon, 'The Gospels According to Saint Bakunin: Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Libertarian Communism', in *A Flame in the Mearns*: *Lewis Grassic Gibbon, A Centenary Celebration*, ed. by Margery Palmer McCulloch and Sarah M. Dunnigan (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2003), pp. 136–47 (pp. 136, 138).
4 Ibid., p. 146.
5 I will use the name J. Leslie Mitchell throughout, unless dealing with those works published under the name Lewis Grassic Gibbon.
6 Letter of 14 November 1930, National Library of Scotland (NLS), Acc. 5325(a).
7 J. Leslie Mitchell, *Stained Radiance: A Fictionist's Prelude* (London: Jarrolds, 1930), p. 67.
8 Ibid., p. 283.
9 Ibid., p. 65.
10 J. Leslie Mitchell, *Stained Radiance: A Fictionist's Prelude* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2000), p. 209.
11 See 'A Forenote on Origins', J. Leslie Mitchell, *The Thirteenth Disciple* (Edinburgh: Paul Harris Publishing, 1981).
12 Letter of 25 October 1930 (Urbana copies, Edinburgh University Library Archives); emphasis in original.
13 Mitchell, *The Thirteenth Disciple*, p. 14.
14 See Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: Bodley Head, 1976); also Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).
15 Mitchell, *The Thirteenth Disciple*, p. 83.
16 Ibid., pp. 77, 84, 99.
17 Ibid., p. 85.
18 Ibid.
19 Ruben Valdes-Miyares, 'Lewis Grassic Gibbon and History: The Shameless Stone of Sisyphus', in *Miscelánea – A Journal of English and American Studies*, 15. 1 (1994), pp. 533–52.
20 Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (London: William Heinemann, 1902).

21 Mitchell, *The Thirteenth Disciple*, p. 192.
22 Ibid., pp. 194, 205.
23 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Revolt of Islam* (1818), Canto 2, XLIII, in *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson; a new edition, corrected by G. M. Matthews (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1973). p. 63.
24 George Woodcock, *Anarchism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 415.
25 Mitchell, *The Thirteenth Disciple*, p. 279.
26 J. Leslie Mitchell, *Image and Superscription* (London: Jarrolds, 1933), pp. 16–17, 29.
27 Three major studies were dedicated to exploration: *Hanno, or The Future of Exploration* (1928), *The Conquest of the Maya* (1934) and *Nine Against The Unknown* (1934). See Scott Lyall, 'J. Leslie Mitchell/ Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Exploration', *Scottish Literary Review*, 4. 1 (Spring/Summer 2012), pp. 131–50.
28 Mitchell, *Image and Superscription*, p. 232.
29 Gibbon, 'Religion', in Munro, *A Scots Hairst*, pp. 157–72.
30 'Synopsis of the Story of Religion' (undated). NLS 7900, Box 7, file 2.
31 Mitchell, *Image and Superscription*, p. 245. The original passage in Matthew 16. 26 is: 'What shall it profit a man though he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'
32 See Cuthbert Graham quoting Mitchell in his review of *Image and Superscription* ('Aberdeen Bon-Accord', 24 March 1933). NLS Acc. 7900, Box 14.
33 William K. Malcolm, 'Shouting Too Loudly: Leslie Mitchell, Humanism and the Art of Excess', in *A Flame in the* Mearns, pp. 76–88.
34 Dixon, in *A Flame in the Mearns*, p. 145.
35 Mitchell, *The Thirteenth Disciple*, p. 223.
36 For the poem 'Spartacus', see *A Scots Hairst*, p. 186.
37 For the cult of heroes/leaders see Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*, pp. 155–210.
38 His widow Ray Mitchell made attempts to sell the novel to film and BBC producers in the 1940s and 1950s, but to no avail (Edinburgh University Library, Cruickshank papers 1966/19–24).
39 J. Leslie Mitchell, *Spartacus* (London: Jarrolds, 1933), p. 74 (emphasis in original).
40 Ibid., p. 81.
41 Ibid., p. 173–74.
42 Ibid., p. 287.

43 Mitchell, *Stained Radiance* (London: Jarrolds, 1930), p. 21.
44 Mitchell is likely to have obtained information about the historical figure from the study of the American socialist C. Osborne Ward's *The Ancient Lowly* (1888).
45 Michail Bakunin, *Gesammelte Werke*, *Vol. 3* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1975), p. 98–99. [The present author's translation.]
46 Mitchell, *Spartacus*, p. 227.
47 Ibid., p. 187 (emphasis in original).
48 J. Leslie Mitchell, 'Controversy – Writers' International (British Section)', *Left Review*, 1 (February 1935), pp. 179–80.
49 Graham Holderness, 'Anarchism and Fiction', in *The Rise of Socialist Fiction 1880–1914*, ed. by H. Gustav Klaus (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987), pp. 121–50 (p. 148).
50 J. Leslie Mitchell, *The Lost Trumpet* (London: Jarrolds, 1932), p. 263.
51 Ernst Bloch, *Ästhetik des Vorscheins, Vol. 1*, ed. by Gert Ueding (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), p. 285. [The present author's translation.]
52 Mitchell, *The Lost Trumpet*, p. 268.
53 J. Leslie Mitchell, 'The Prince´s Placenta and Prometheus as God', *The Twentieth Century*, 2. 12 (1932), pp. 16–18.
54 Lewis Grassic Gibbon, 'News of Battle: Queries for Mr Whyte', *The Free Man*, 3 (17 March 1934), p. 9.
55 See Jeremy Idle, 'Introduction to "The Epic", "Dienekes' Dream", "Revolt"', in *The Speak of the Mearns*, intro. by Ian Campbell and Jeremy Idle (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1994), pp. 218–22.
56 Ian Campbell, 'The Science Fiction of John [*sic*] Leslie Mitchell', *Extrapolation*, 16.1 (December 1974), p. 53–63 (p. 59).
57 H. J. Massingham, *The Golden Age: The Story of Human Nature* (London: Howe, 1927), p. vii.
58 Letter of 2 November 1934. NLS, D/209/17.
59 Cuthbert Graham, 'Lewis Grassic Gibbon', *Aberdeen University Review* (Winter 1941), pp. 4–16 (p. 12).
60 Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*, p. 206.
61 J. Leslie Mitchell, *Three Go Back* (London: Jarrolds, 1932), pp. 91–92.
62 J. Leslie Mitchell, *Gay Hunter* (London: Heinemann, 1934), p. 14. Mitchell likely drew on John Strachey's *The Coming Struggle for Power* (1932) and *The Menace of Fascism* (1933).
63 See Gibbon, 'Religion', in *A Scots Hairst*, p. 170.
64 Mitchell, *Gay Hunter*, p. 135. For the 'crossroads'-metaphor, see Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p. 88.

65 Malcolm, in *'To Hell with Culture'*.
66 Gibbon, 'Literary Lights', in *A Scots* Hairst, p. 154.
67 Gibbon, 'The Land', in *A Scots Hairst*, pp. 71–72.
68 Dixon, in *A Flame in the Mearns*, p. 146.
69 Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Cloud Howe* (London: Pan Books, 1983), p. 221.
70 David Margolies, 'Left Review and Left Literary Theory', in *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties*, ed. by Jon Clark and others (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), pp. 67–82 (p. 79).
71 Holderness, in *The Rise of Socialist Fiction 1880–1914*, p. 148.

6: Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Women

1 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 96. Published in book form in 1929, *A Room of One's Own* was first delivered as lectures in 1928.
2 See Helen B. Cruickshank, 'Mearns Memory', *Scots Magazine*, February 1939, pp. 351–53. In *Octobiography* (Montrose: Strand Press, 1976) Cruickshank describes writing to the author of *Sunset Song*: 'I added a postscript that we would be delighted to welcome L.G.G. at Dinnieduff if he, or she, were visiting Edinburgh', noting that her mother, 'still a great reader at eighty years of age, devoured the book eagerly' (p. 87).
3 Deirdre Burton, 'A Feminist Reading of Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*', in *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Jeremy Hawthorn (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), pp. 35–46 (p. 35).
4 J. Leslie Mitchell, *The Thirteenth Disciple* (Edinburgh: B & W Publishing, 1995), p. 211.
5 Ibid., p. 215.
6 The first three chapters of Olive Schreiner's *Women and Labour* (1911) are entitled 'Parasitism'.
7 Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Cloud Howe*, in *A Scots Quair* (London: Jarrolds, 1952), p. 139.
8 Cicely Hamilton, *Marriage as a Trade* (London: The Women's Press, 1981), p. 50.
9 J. Leslie Mitchell, *Three Go Back* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1995), p. 104.
10 Ibid., p. 106.
11 See Keith Dixon, 'Rough Edges: The Feminist Representation of Women in the Writing of Lewis Grassic Gibbon', in *Studies in Scottish Fiction: Twentieth Century*, ed. by Horst Drescher and Joachim

Schwend (Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 1990), pp. 289–301, and Keith Dixon, 'The Gospel According to Saint Bakunin: Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Libertarian Communism', in *A Flame in the Mearns: Lewis Grassic Gibbon, A Centenary Celebration*, ed. by Margery Palmer McCulloch and Sarah M. Dunnigan (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2003), pp. 136–47.

12 Lewis Grassic Gibbon, 'Forsaken', in Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Hugh MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene, or The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn* (1934); reprinted in *Smeddum: A Lewis Grassic Gibbon Anthology*, ed. by Valentina Bold (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001), p. 50.

13 J. Leslie Mitchell, 'The Road', originally published in *The Cornhill*, LXVII, September 1929, pp. 341–52; reprinted in *Smeddum*, pp. 250–64.

14 Dixon in *Studies in Scottish Fiction: Twentieth Century*.

15 Lewis Grassic Gibbon, 'Smeddum', in Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*; reprinted in *Smeddum*, p. 36.

16 Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Sunset Song*, in *A Scots Quair* (London: Jarrolds, 1952), pp. 191, 194.

17 For further discussion of the 'symbolic feminine' in twentieth-century Scottish writing and earlier see Carol E. Anderson, 'The Representation of Women in Scottish Fiction: Character and Symbol' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1985).

18 Neil M. Gunn, *Highland River* (London; Arrow Books, 1975), p. 107, and *Butcher's Broom* (London: Souvenir Press, 1977), p. 318.

19 Hugh MacDiarmid, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, ed. by Kenneth Buthlay (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987), p. 18. For discussion of this see Kirsten Stirling, *Bella Caledonia: Woman, Nation, Text* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2008), pp. 40–47, and Aileen Christianson, 'Flyting with a Drunk Man', *Scottish Affairs*, 5 (1993), pp. 126–35.

20 J. Leslie Mitchell, *Stained Radiance: A Fictionist's Prelude* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1993), p. 82.

21 Isobel Murray, 'Selves, Names and Roles: Willa Muir's *Imagined Corners* Offers Some Inspiration for *A Scots Quair*', *Scottish Literary Journal*, 21.1 (1994), pp. 56–64.

22 Gibbon, *Sunset Song*, p. 37.

23 J. Leslie Mitchell, *Image and Superscription* (London: Jarrolds, 1933), p. 174.

24 Isobel Murray, 'Gibbon's Chris: A Celebration with Some Reservations', in *A Flame in the Mearns*, pp. 54–63 (p. 59).

25 Mitchell, *Three Go Back*, p. 12
26 Ibid., p. 142.
27 Carol Anderson, '*Morvern Callar*', *Scottish Literary Journal Supplement*, 44 (1996), pp. 64–7.
28 J. Leslie Mitchell, *Gay Hunter* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989), p. 102.
29 Ibid., pp. 4, 92.
30 Edwin Morgan's Introduction to the 1989 Polygon edition of *Gay Hunter* offers an excellent analysis of these developments.
31 Gibbon, *Cloud Howe*, p. 10.
32 Ibid., p. 126.
33 Mitchell, *Gay Hunter*, p. 117.
34 Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Grey Granite*, in *A Scots Quair* (London: Jarrolds, 1952), p. 143.
35 Alison Lumsden '"Women's Time": Reading the *Quair* as a Feminist Text', in *A Flame in the Mearns*, pp. 41–53 (p. 42).
36 See Anderson, 'The Representation of Women in Scottish Fiction: Character and Symbol', and Lumsden, in *A Flame in the Mearns*.
37 Mitchell, *Image and Superscription*, p. 181.
38 Ibid., p. 225.
39 See Stirling, *Bella Caledonia*, pp. 49–50.
40 Gibbon, *Cloud Howe*, p. 104.
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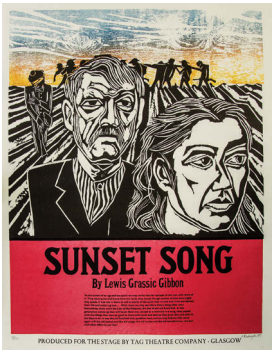
INTERNATIONAL COMPANION TO LEWIS GRASSIC GIBBON

EDITED BY SCOTT LYALL

Lewis Grassic Gibbon (James Leslie Mitchell), the author of the acclaimed trilogy *A Scots Quair – Sunset Song*, *Cloud Howe* and *Grey Granite* – is one of the most important Scottish writers of the early twentieth century. This INTERNATIONAL COMPANION provides a thorough overview of Gibbon's writing. Examining his works within the social, political, and literary developments of his time, this volume demonstrates Gibbon's continuing relevance both in Scotland and internationally.



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